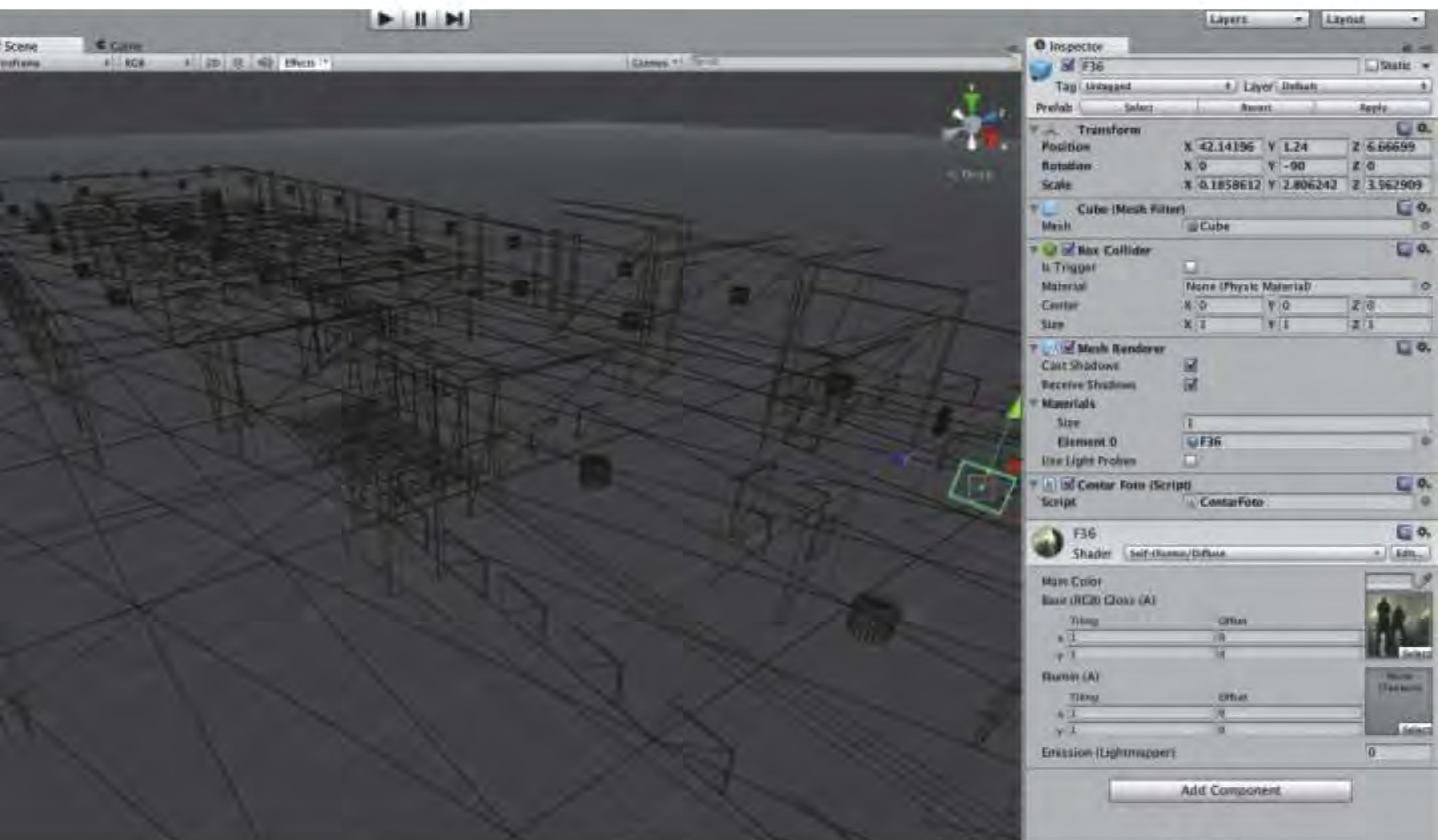


MFGI : A Virtual Photographic Museum for Archives' Masterpieces

Joan Boadas
i Raset
David Iglésias
Franch
Spain



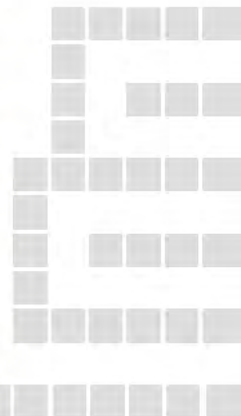
Structure before rendering

The Centre for Image Research and Diffusion (CRDI) of Girona City Council opened in October 2012 the **Museum of Photography in Girona (MFGi)**, a virtual museum displaying the most representative images of Girona's photography, outstanding authors, major photographic genres and different photographic manifestations linked to the city.

The museum was conceived as a space for dissemination, knowledge and research on photography, mainly focused on the fonds and collections of the CRDI. The Centre was created in 1997 with the mission to "know, protect, promote, offer and disseminate Giro-

na's documentary heritage on images to society". Since its founding moments, it has had among its objectives: "to provide citizens and professionals with an exhibition space for the promotion of the documentary heritage on images and works of artistic creation" and to "explore the ways of new technologies to improve our contribution to the preservation and use of the documentation". Therefore, the creation of the museum allows in large part the achievement of these initial purposes.

MFGi has been developed by Evol Company (Online Virtual Spaces) with the same 3D technology applied to video games, which re-



Inside the rooms, images hanging on the walls are exhibited with their corresponding information panels. Visitors can click on each picture to see it individually and zoom in to view all the details

presents a step forward from existing projects such as Google Art. In this case, movement through different virtual spaces is continuous and without interruptions. It is important to acknowledge the pioneering nature of implementing this technology in the area of museums.

In this virtual space, visitors can move using 3D technology. Upon entering the museum there is a reception area where it is possible to move towards the permanent room or, if preferred, to the ongoing temporal exhibition. Inside the rooms, images hanging on the walls are exhibited with their corresponding information panels. Visitors can click on each picture to see it individually and zoom in to view all the details. Every image contains technical information about its descriptive parameters.

This museum has the precedent of a room dedicated to the photographic work of Josep Buil i Mayral (Girona, 1920 – Ibiza, 2005). The museum's intention is to progressively open new temporal exhibition rooms to offer a tour through the work of the city's photographers, thus promoting and granting value to creative photographic work, both historical and contemporary.

The permanent room

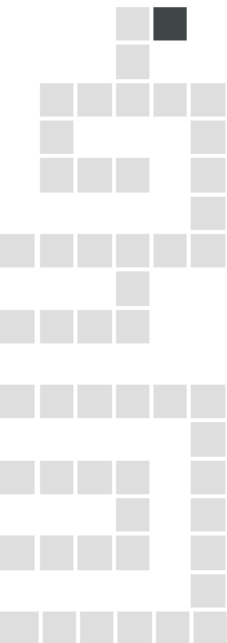
Walter Benjamin wrote that it was not the time to ask if photography was an art or not but to elucidate how the advent of photography had swayed the traditional concept of art. Under this premise, the Centre for Image Research and Diffusion posed its museum discourse for the exhibition of the most relevant photographic work, regardless of their categorization and various intrinsic values attributable to photographic images.

The museum's permanent collection was conceived as a space for the promotion and dissemination of photography and professionals who, for many decades, have contributed to configuring a unique legacy. Some of the most relevant authors are: Joan Martí, Valentí Fargnoli, Josep Jou, Francesc Riuró, Narcís Sans and Josep Buil, to name those most represented in our collections and whose work surely goes beyond local interest.

There are ten separate spaces, each of them containing a dozen photographs. These are not rooms but delimited spaces that spread from a central spine that allows a perimetral circuit where the stop in each space is optional. Throughout the tour, the work of major authors is shown, some of whom are truly outstanding authors.

The groups, however, are governed primarily by functional and aesthetic criteria, in a categorization established according to photographic specialities and creative movements that often lend more to a subjective interpretation of the creative work than the author's original intent. Thus, sections are dedicated to: photography in the 19th century, the portrait, documentary photography, advertising photography, subjectivism, pictorialism, salonism, avant-garde, press photography and, finally, contemporary creation.

Let us not forget that diverse photographic specialities constitute themselves according to the principles of technology. For instance, in the early years of photography there was a clear difference between the work created under the security of a gallery and the challenge of going outside. Outdoor photography was initially perceived as more static, (of a catalogue), but later on, snapshots allowed creating closer and more real stories. It is a journey of





Museum rendered with textures.

more than 170 years of history, ranging from daguerreotypes to digital imaging. Within the museum discourse there is, therefore, a tale of different photographic techniques, all with a common goal: the creation of the image—although manifested in a wide variety of forms.

Temporary rooms

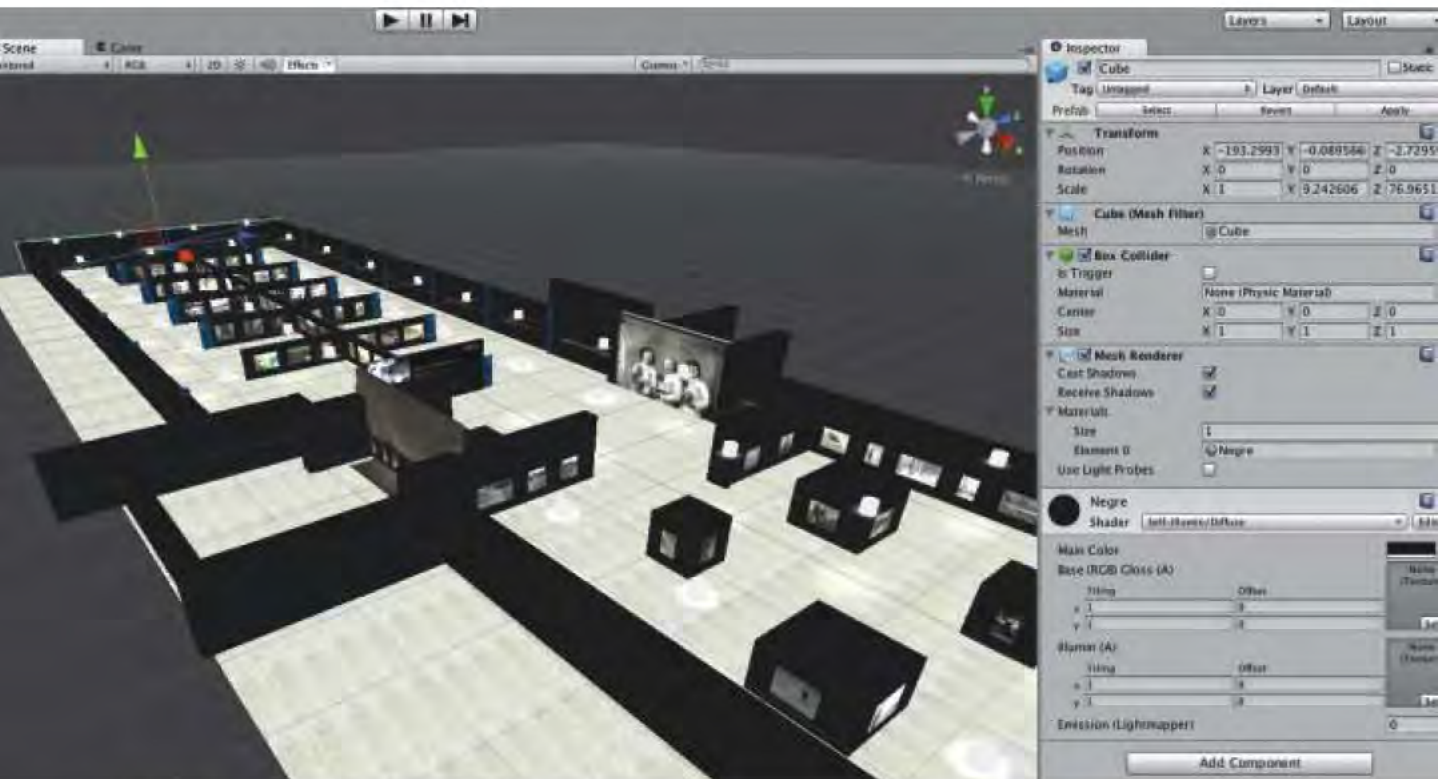
MFGi has a temporary room dedicated, at this time, to the photographer Josep Buil Mayral (1920-2005), a key figure in understanding the first steps of Catalan modern photography of post-war years.

Josep Buil started his photographic activity as

an amateur during the 1950s. In 1954, he participated in the foundation of the Photographic and Cinematographic Association of Girona City and Province (AFYC), a collective initiative to promote creation and bring the photography produced in Girona closer to Europe.

As a professional, Buil worked for several companies: Usted magazine, Los Sitios newspaper, Presencia magazine, EFE, Europa Press and, mainly, Everest publishers and the newspaper Diario de Ibiza. His appreciation as a photographer in Girona is supported by 72 awards besides being the only author in Spain





Finished room,
with lights
and textures.

represented at the 11th *International Salon of Photographic Art* held in Santiago de Chile in 1962. Buil was awarded the international graphic journalism prize García de Sáez in 1975, in Ibiza, and also won the award as the best press photographer of that island in 1981.

A space for research

The museum's entrance hall has been conceived as a recreational space with a coffee shop and a bookstore that provides access to the collection Girona Photographers, an indispensable basis for research on authors and photographic work linked to the archive.

Therefore, with regard to the MFGi, it is essential to mention these publications. The collection *Girona Photographers*, was created in 2008 with the intention of giving value to the work of photographers from Girona, or with a photographic production linked to the city, from the most global perspective possible. The pages from these books contain photographs with a particular documentary value that help us comprehend the city's past and also all those images known as 'signature photography', that is, images whose components are directly linked to their artistic value. Ultimately, the goal is to raise awareness, here and elsewhere, of the quality of works that are perfectly comparable to many of those taken from the best cameras in Europe.

Up to now, the collection has 11 titles and the intention continues to be publishing one book a year, in order to broaden our knowledge of the photographic fonds tied to the city. The titles already published are: Joan Martí Centellas. *Beauties of Girona, 1877*. (2008); Josep Buil Mayral (2008); Antoni Varés Martinell (2009); Jean Dieuzaide (2009); Valentí Fargnoli I (2010); Valentí Fargnoli II (2010); Francesc Riuró (2011); Martí Massafont (2012); Josep Jou (2013); and Narcís Sans (2014). All of these photographers are related to the city of Girona and have produced outstanding work that is definitely worthy of study and consideration from researchers. That is why the selection of photographs in each volume is preceded by a biographical study and a study on the evaluation of the selected pieces. The overall figure is close to 200 pages – written by renowned historians, archivists and photography scholars – which constitute the essential source for the articulation of a museum discourse like the one presented in this virtual resource.

Outstanding works in the collection of CRDI

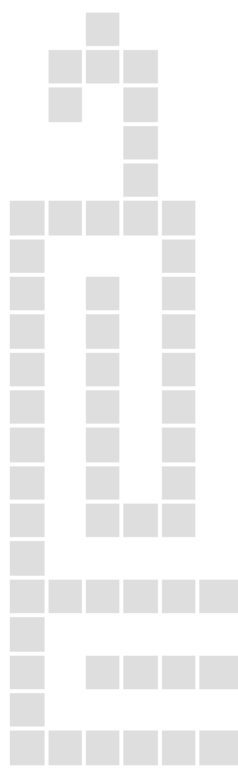
The images selected by this museum are a sample of the collections and fonds of the Centre for Image Research and Diffusion (CRDI) of Girona City Council, which holds more than 3 million photographs, from 1840 to the present day. Within this extensive body of work there are a lot of topics depicted and we would like to point out the different spheres of creation, to better contextualize authors and their photographic work.

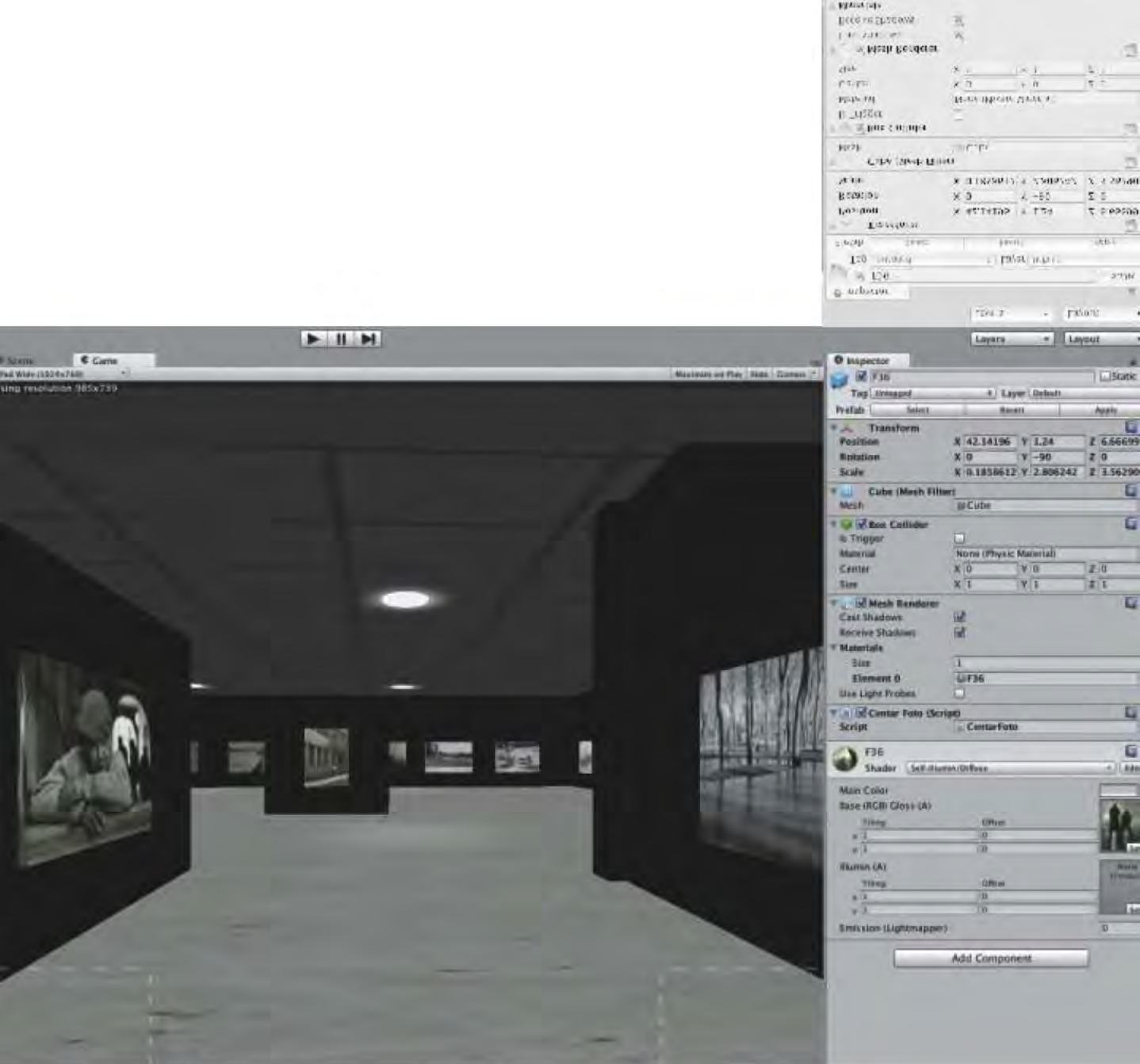
One of these thematic areas would be the portrait. In Girona, photography started consolidating itself as a social phenomenon around 1860. It was at this time, thus, when the first portraitists – Ramon Massaguer and Amis

Unal– started opening permanent galleries in the city, as it was also happening in most European cities. The number of galleries increased considerably and it became very large, although we would like to draw attention to the galleries Fotografia Unal and Foto Lux, due to their continuity in time and the preservation of a significant part of their archives.

Also noteworthy are the albums, amongst which there are true works of craftsmanship. The most outstanding outdoor photographs from the 19th century can be found in the album *Beauties of Girona*, by Joan Martí Centellas (1877), which portrays the major heritage treasures of the city. Images of monuments and works of art had turned into another focus of interest for photographers, even if it was a much harder and praiseworthy task than study sessions. Joan Martí made a first album commissioned by the Cathedral Chapter, with carbon copies, which served as a gift from the city to Pope Pius IX. Simultaneously, the same publisher (Vives) issued an album with albumen prints destined to a wider public that was also distributed gradually in individual prints.

Another important source of production was postcards, with series dedicated to landscapes, monuments, and social events. Unlike Barcelona, in Girona there were no real postcard professionals, although there were some attempts. Nevertheless, from the point of view of creation, the most remarkable were Valentí Fargnoli’s postcards, made in dry gelatine copies instead of photomechanical prints. This photographer captured numerous photographs from towns around Girona and their inhabitants, in a style that defines him as the most relevant figure in the history of photography of Girona’s area at the beginning of





Indoor visit,
with
navigation buttons.

the 20th century. Fargnoli's photographs are characterized by being, almost always, in a postcard format, by having the author's signature on the negative itself or in the positive copy, also by providing documentary notes regularly, and by the unique nature of the printing process (valued by Fargnoli himself for its artistic and personal stamp).

Amateur creation became popular much later than in other countries and it is usually con-

sidered as such after 1910. This type of photography has some aesthetic and thematic features and some formal aspects that did not perceptively vary over almost three decades. The producers of these images were generally liberal professionals with significant technical expertise that acquired, in most cases, stereoscopic cameras. Most of them had their own laboratory where they developed and printed glass plate negatives. Amid this intellectual bourgeoisie we can find a few photo-

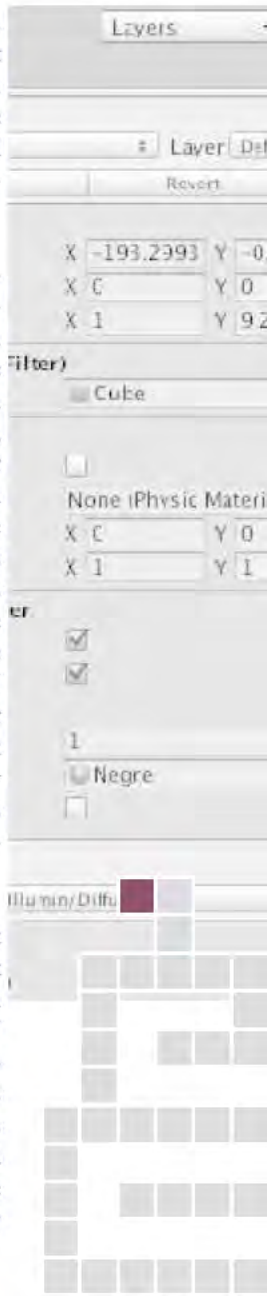
graphers in Girona, of whom we can distinguish Joan Masó, since he was the first photographer in the city who made colour photographs. In 1923, he started using the autochrome technique, a commercial process patented by the Lumiere brothers in 1907. Besides technical considerations, what is really interesting about amateur photography is the new perspective that these professionals used to document their most immediate surroundings, to show their particular interests and also to express their creativity.

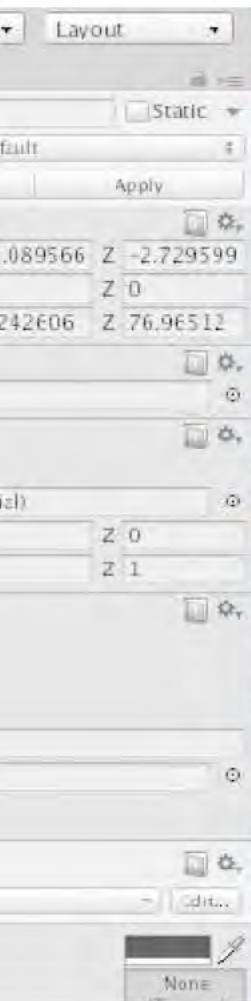
Between amateurism and professionalism, we can find the most important focus of creation: the Photographic and Cinematographic Association of Girona and Province (AFYC), founded in 1954, which represents a fundamental event for the history of photography in Girona during the second half of the 20th century. In spite of being often considered quite negatively – mainly because most of their photography belongs to the realm of leisure–photographic associations had the virtue of bringing together interests, creating spaces for exhibitions, encouraging creation by means of contests, guiding photographers and, above all, opening the eyes of Girona’s photographers to the world. Their existence was, among many other things, a link between Europe and what was starting in the Catalan capital. Probably, this fact changed the reality of Girona, unlike earlier periods such as the avant-gardes in the thirties, which were experienced from a great distance. In a way, AFYC made it possible that those artistic movements in peninsular Spain, focused in Barcelona, Madrid and Almeria, were not independent of local creation; as evidenced by the analysis and observation of the work of the most prominent authors, amongst which

stands the figure of Josep Buil Mayral. Nonetheless, it is important to note that salonism aesthetics was still predominant, with a traditional photography ruled by the standards of that period and that technical perfection, innocuous topics, and classic composition were highly valued.

In the strictly professional field, the photojournalism has to be taken into account. Modern photojournalism in Europe was born in the thirties, a decade in which the photojournalistic trend also started in Catalonia with the so-called Leica generation, of which Agustí Centellas was the major emblem. In Girona, local press continued in the same line as in earlier times, where the presence of images was quite limited. It was not until well into the 1950s that photographs began to appear more frequently. Of all the photographers who worked in the press, we must mention the outstanding figures of Narcís Sans, Sebastia Martí or Salvador Crescenti, among others. The enormous work of these professionals has left a very significant legacy to document history besides some images with a remarkable aesthetic component.

Finally, it is important to underline the project “Archives, memory and research”; a project counselled by the Foto Colectania Foundation that started in 2005 with the purpose of enriching the archive’s photographic collection of contemporary authors and that has involved internationally prominent authors such as Joan Fontcoberta, Isabel Munoz, Rosa i Bleda, and Julio Duarte. These works are the culmination of an extraordinary journey through the artistic creation of our city.





3D technology for the dissemination of photographic heritage

The creation of this virtual resource has been carried out by EVOL (Online Virtual Spaces), a company specialized in 3D virtual design composed of a team of professionals with extensive experience in developing innovative and creative projects in the cultural heritage area. The realization of these projects counts on high-performance computer equipment and the latest software: Autodesk Maya for 3D modelling, Adobe Photoshop for photographic textures of designs, and Unity 3d as a videogame graphics engine to enable movement in virtual spaces.

MFGi has been conceived with the idea that photographic work ought to be the true appeal of this virtual space. This premise has determined the whole project both in terms of architectural design, navigation system inside the room, and technological resources built into it.

As for the architectural design, the museum's rooms are characterized by a minimalist design, with simple lines and a cubist modular structure. The walls are dark and photographs are displayed in large format inside light boxes in order to direct the user's attention towards the images.



One of the elements that required the utmost attention was the navigation system and interactivity. The aim was to permit easy navigation through the interior of the room, without obstacles that prevent users from moving freely. That is why wide spaces were designed throughout the tour. The wide range of interactive resources present in a virtual 3D room is another of the important assets, among which the following are of note: the inclusion of multilingual audio to explain exhibitions, the possibility of linking to an external website, the incorporation of social networks, the expansion of images, touch-screen information panels, the possibility of issuing videos, etc.

In short, this is a latest generation 3D virtual space with videogame technology from a powerful graphic engine, which allows the inclusion of several interactive resources that make it a highly attractive space for users. The application is ready for access from mobile devices, like iPhone or iPad, as well as from any computer in a Web environment.

<http://www.girona.cat/sgdap/cat/MFGi.php>

Acknowledgement:

In collaboration with Esteve Vilarrubias and Josep Compte, from Evol

