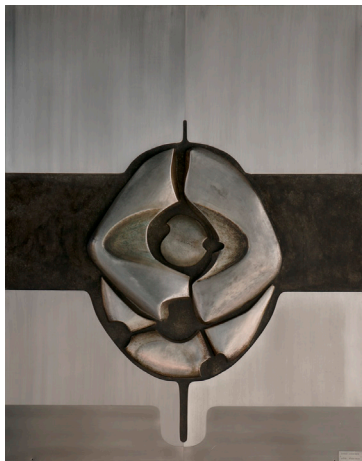


The BBVA Collection boasts significant works created in the 1970s and 1980s by the artist María Belén Morales, one of the most outstanding twentieth-century sculptors from the Canaries. She was also a pioneer in the development of non-figurative internationally-oriented art in the islands. Morales is also noted for her role in disseminating modernism in art in the Canaries and in raising awareness of the work of contemporary women artists.

At a time when women's art education was generally restricted to the domestic realm—where contact with art was normally through a male figure in their personal circle—María Belén Morales decided to become a sculptor and to study art professionally.



María Belén Morales  
*Gran Semilla*, 1978  
Aluminum and galvanized  
steel  
267 x 230 x 17 cm  
Nº inv. 2288

Thus, in the 1950s she attended the School of Arts and Crafts and the School of Fine Arts in Santa Cruz de Tenerife. Those were rather dark days for art in Spain, generally defined by profound cultural isolation. The artists from the Canaries developed their practices within academicist principles, mostly creating landscapes and indigenist scenes. Since her childhood, Morales moved within a culturally advanced artistic circle and sensed that there were alternative paths to develop modern art, adapted to the international reality of the time.

Key to reaffirming Morales in her approach was Eduardo Westerdahl (1902-1983), a painter, art critic and promoter of *Gaceta de Arte*, an art journal launched in 1932 and discontinued with the outbreak of the Spanish Civil War. The magazine and Westerdahl himself, who had strong links with the European avant-garde, channelled the arrival of Modernism and Surrealism to the Canary Islands. After her discovery of the work of artists like Óscar Domínguez (1906-1957) and her contact with figures like César Manrique (1919-1992), Morales reasserted her will to create a freer and more personal art.

Morales' work was always defined by her unbounded visual experimentation, which led her to explore Surrealism, to study the organic forms of nature—developing a sculpture language very much in tune with that of the British sculptor Barbara Hepworth

## MARÍA BELÉN MORALES

Inspirational Women Artists  
in the BBVA Collection



Image: (C) Archivo MBM - TEA Tenerife Espacio de las Artes

(1903-1975)—and to a heightened simplicity in forms. The result was the consolidation of an oeuvre underwritten by great formal and conceptual subtlety, akin to American Minimal Art. As an artist, Morales pioneered the emergence of a non-figurative language in the Canaries, and always remained active in the islands' art scene notwithstanding the obstacles encountered by many women painters and sculptors.

She also encouraged the implementation and



María Belén Morales  
*Formas del Silencio II y III*, 1981  
mahogany, metal and lacquered wood mural  
209 x 290 x 40 cm  
Nº inv. P06461 y P06462

consolidation of a new abstract vocabulary in the Canary Islands, participating, in 1963, in the foundation of the *Nuestro Arte* group, made up by the artists Pepe Abad (1942), Manolo Casanova, Pedro González (1923), Eva Fernández (1911-2005), Jose Luis Fajardo (1941), Maribel Nazco (1928) and Manuel Villate. *Nuestro Arte* also included key art critics and historians like Enrique Lite, Miguel Tarkis and Antonio Vizcaya. The group championed modernism in art and the creation of an avant-garde art specific to the Canaries that would transcend the prevailing local orientation. This favoured the birth in the islands of a movement led by a group of artists and intellectuals who developed an abstract language in parallel to the opening of the Museo de Arte Abstracto Español in Cuenca (1966), which marked Spain's definitive opening to modernism.

Morales also contributed to the recognition of the work of other women artists of the time through the group exhibition 12, held in 1965. Organised in collaboration with Maud and Eduardo Westerdahl and Tanja Tamvelius (1901-1969), the exhibition showcased works by twelve women artists from various origins in the *Círculo de Bellas Artes* and the *Instituto de Estudios Hispánicos*. The exhibition was the first in the Canaries and the second in Spain to show works created exclusively by women, thus championing the role of women artists in Spain in the sixties.

A defender of progress, openness and modernism, through her own production and her role in various cultural initiatives, María Belén Morales fostered the emergence and development of the internatio-

nal abstract language in the Canary Islands. Her personal circumstances, together with a social and cultural milieu reluctant to accept the participation of women in the art scene, prevented her from gaining the international recognition enjoyed by other great artists from her generation. Notwithstanding, the quality of her three-dimensional practice confirms the importance of her sculpture within the overall context of twentieth-century Spanish art.

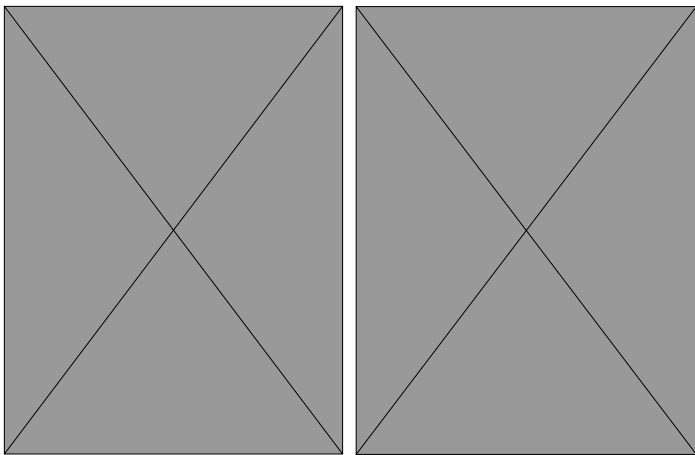


María Belén Morales  
Detail of *Formas del Silencio I*, 1980  
mahogany, metal and lacquered wood mural  
100 x 300 x 17,5 cm  
N° inv.34016

Soledad Sevilla (Valencia, 1944) is one of Spain's most highly respected artists. Throughout her career she has received several important awards, such as the National Visual Arts Prize in 1993, the Gold Medal of Merit in Fine Art in 2007 and the Arte y Mecenazgo Award in 2014. More recently, she was awarded the Velázquez Visual Arts Prize in 2020, which extolled her contribution to Ibero-American culture as *"a pioneer in the experimentation with languages"*. During her long-standing career, her academic and exhibition activity has been prolific and her work is to be found in major collections.

Realized mainly in painting and installation, her constantly changing output has nevertheless been absolutely coherent in terms of the concerns she addresses. Generally working across series, she investigates forms of representing immateriality as well as the way in which light, sound or smell can create an atmosphere and how to capture it.

Within the remit of a carefully conceived brand of abstraction, she explores art's potential to facilitate an understanding of space, and how to recreate and inhabit it. This leads to extraordinary results of great beauty and harmony that combine geometry and lyricism, rules and sentiments.

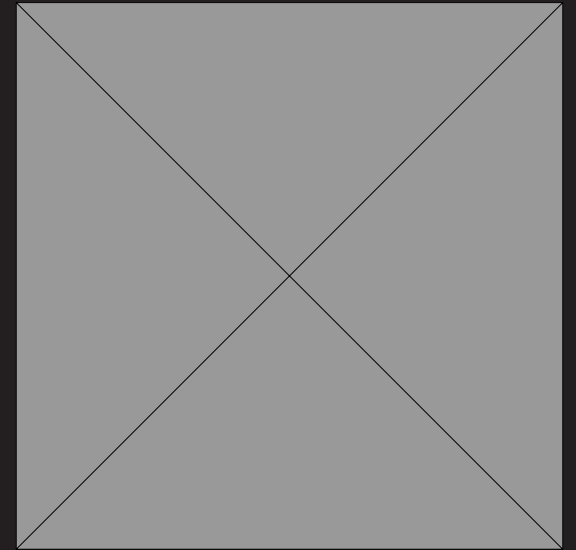


Soledad Sevilla  
Hacia el burladero (Into the Covert) and Capotes oscuros (Dark Capes), 1988  
Etching and aquatint on paper (H.C.)  
75.70 x 56.30 cm  
Inv. no. 5413 and 5414

**Question.** Since the seventies, your work could be framed within the context of geometric abstraction. What motivated you to choose this language as your means of expression?

# SOLEDAD SEVILLA

Inspirational Women Artists  
in the BBVA Collection



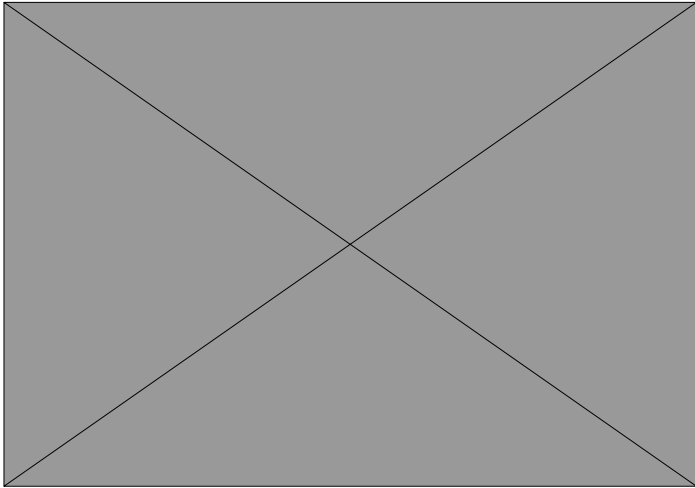
**Answer.** *It was probably a reaction against the academic teaching we received at the School of Fine Art, which at the time had not yet been incorporated into the university. I was driven by a need to discover a more contemporary, more modern world.*

**Q.** Your work straddles installation, one of the most versatile contemporary mediums, and painting, currently associated with a more conventional idea of art. The holdings of the BBVA Collec-

tion include your painting *Número 1* (Number 1), from the site-specific project for Castillo de Vélez Blanco. What do you get from this dialogue between different disciplines which you have maintained throughout your career?

*A. I am equally interested in both. On one hand, painting in the studio is very introspective while, on the other, installation means you must engage with other spaces where you have to make an intervention. In many instances, painting has derived into installation and vice versa.*

*Q. At the moment we are seeing more and more efforts*



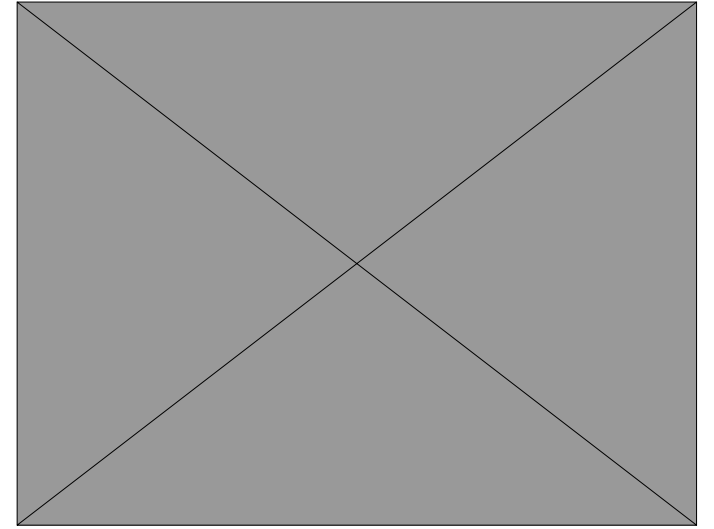
Soledad Sevilla  
*Número 1* (Number 1), 1995  
Oil on canvas  
100.3 x 140.2 cm  
Inv. no. 4160

to close the gender gap in the art world, to recover and reappraise women artists and thus create a much more diverse outlook. Who were your references when you started? Were there any women among them?

*A. Yes, when I was starting out I greatly admired Carmen Laffón, and I still do today. There was an atmosphere in her painting that I wanted to capture in mine, and in fact, I told Carmen that I copied her. And among previous generations I was interested in María Blanchard and Niki de Saint Phalle.*

*Q. The current situation over the last year has emphasised culture's eternal need to reinvent itself in order to adapt to changing circumstances. Have you found opportunities in the use of new technologies for artistic experimentation? As we have seen, in your practice the relationship between the actual work and the space where it is shown is fundamental. Do you see digital media as a tool to rethink the aesthetic experience? Is it possible to explore one of your installations in virtual reality?*

*A. I don't believe so. In fact, I was using digital media as far back as the seventies but I lost interest in them, so you could say that I have actually travelled the opposite path. Although I worked for several years with the seminar on the automatic generation of plastic forms at the Computer Centre in Universidad Complutense de Madrid and*



Carmen Laffón  
*Still life*, 1986  
Oil on canvas  
50 x 60.2 cm  
Inv. no. 2560

*the results were exhibited in various shows, I reached the conclusion that it was not a means of expression for me, and that I needed something more personal, more introspective, and so I gave up working with computers.*