

Nicolás Muller. North Wind

Nicolás Muller (1913-2000) was born in Oròsháza (Hungary) in 1913, into a secular, bourgeois Jewish family. Following the family tradition, he obtained a doctorate in Law and Political Sciences, although, from childhood, photography would be his true vocation.

He suffered the run-up to the Second World War and, sensing the danger, after a stay in Austria, he abandoned his country and travelled to Italy, France, Portugal, Morocco and, finally, Spain.

During his university period, he would initiate collaborations with other young scholars (poets, ethnologists, artists, and other groups) who shared his concern for the extreme hardship in which the Hungarian working class lived. This would lead to his initial photographic collaborations.

In France, he developed and enriched his training as a documentary photographer. After a brief stay Portugal, in 1939 he arrived in Tangier, where he would start up his own photography studio.

In 1948, he arrived in Spain, aided by the Asturian, Fernando Vela, who would become his patron and friend and with whom he would collaborate in various Spanish publications, such as the newspaper, España in Tangier, or the Institute of Political Studies. He established his photography studio in Madrid, where he was highly involved in cultural activities, taking part in debates with the intellectuals and artists of the period, and portraying the majority of them. He also undertook numerous commissions which would take him to every corner of our country. In 1961, he obtained Spanish nationality.

Fernando Vela invited him to see Asturias and Nicolás Muller was dazzled, above all with the landscape of eastern Asturias. Living in Asturias would become his dream. He built a house in Andrín (Llanes) which would become his favourite place to rest, and his retreat in his retirement. Of Asturias, he once said that he felt unable to capture the beauty of that land. This is precisely the "leitmotiv" of this exhibition.

We have reviewed and recovered the work that Muller produced in the north of Spain. The result is these 81 images that reveal his gaze in Asturias, Galicia, Cantabria, the Basque Country, and Navarre.

To facilitate an in-depth knowledge of his work, the exhibition is supplemented with another section of his better-known works, which include 49 images from the so-called Masterpieces.

José Ferrero Villares
Curator of the exhibition

Masterpieces

Nicolás Muller lived through turbulent times; faced with the imminent arrival of the Nazi army, he fled his native Hungary, and he travelled through France, Portugal, and Morocco, until his arrival in Spain.

The diffusion of his work has habitually focused on that produced in these 5 stages. Humanistic photography of unquestionable quality, and which has been defined as "Masterpieces"

We felt that, when bringing his unpublished images to light, they needed to be associated with his more recognised work.

For this reason, the work "North Wind" is accompanied by these 49 images, which serve to appreciate the dimension of his oeuvre.

North Wind

His status as a foreigner, along with the excellent quality of his work, would allow Nicolás Muller to undertake numerous works of an official nature for a Spain which, once the conflict has concluded, wished to open up to the outside world and develop its tourism potential.

One of these commissions would be to produce a set of 12 books, illustrated richly with photographs, which needed to showcase the richness of the Spanish landscape and culture.

Between 1966 and 1968, six of these volumes were produced, devoted to Cantabria, the Basque Country, Catalonia, The Balearic Islands, Andalusia, and the Canary Islands. The rest were never completed.

It should be remembered that, back then, there were no autonomous communities, and the distribution into regions was different from the current one.

The images required for those books included a large number of emblematic monuments and buildings, all of which were well known. Nonetheless, they also needed to have images depicting everyday life in towns and cities. These were the images that enabled Nicolás Muller to develop his personal vision, and it is these to which we have resorted for this exhibition.

These photographs, for the most part, were never printed on paper, rather a small number of them were used to illustrate the books, with the aggravating factor of being almost always being re-framed to adapt them to the spaces available in each publication. Even going as far, on more than a few occasions, as using various different "pieces" of the same image in different parts of the book. This, coupled with the poor printing quality of the books, made Nicolás Muller despair, and possibly led to these photographs falling into oblivion.

They were found by Ana Muller when closing the studio in which she had continued her photographic activity after her father's retirement.

We have discovered the enormous quality of these works, as was to be expected, and we have printed a small part of them, (there could be a good deal more, but the size of the exhibition would be too extensive) to verify that are at the same level as his better-known works.

Nicolás Muller

Nicolás Muller (Orosháza, Hungary, 1913- Llanes, Asturias, Spain, 2000) forms part of that exceptional roster of well-known Hungarian photographers, such as André Kertész, László Moholy Nagy, Martin Munkácsi, Brassai, Lucien Hervé and Robert Capa.

Of Jewish origin, he lived the run-up to the Second World War in his native land and, like the majority of Jews, had emigrate to save his life. During this period, he toured Italy, France, Portugal, and Morocco, until he finally ended up in Spain, where he would definitively settle.

1931 – From an early age, he devotes himself to photographing the harsh conditions of rural life in Hungary.

1933 – He undertakes his first work as a photographer, at the Photo Service Agency in Vienna.

1935 – He obtains a doctorate in Law and Political Sciences, but he is already clear about his passion for photography.

1937 – He published his first book of photographs, entitled *Life of our Peasants*. He also collaborates with his images in publications along with the poet Miklós Radnóti, the artist Jorge Buday, and the ethnologist Julio Ortutay: "It was here that all of my training, my ideas, the line of my thought were forged". His images illustrate *The Corner of Storms*, the first of a series of books on the life of Hungarian peasant life.

1938 – Germany annexes Austria, and Muller decides to move to Paris, passing through Italy, which is already under Mussolini's fascist regime.

He arrives in Paris and finally enjoys the sensation of freedom that he so longed for. There, he meets other Hungarian artists, such as Lajos Tihanyi, Brassai, Robert Capa, and even Picasso. It is perhaps during this period that he develops his potential as a photographer.

He travels all over the country, with the help of his cousin Lucian, doing work for *Regards*, *Paris Match*, *Paris Plaisirs*, *Plaisirs France*, *Mundo Latino*, *Editions Hyperion*, and *France Magazine*.

1939 – When France goes to war with Germany, he moves to Portugal, passing through a Spain decimated by the Civil War, to produce a report on the country for *France Magazine*. But he will no longer return to Paris.

After a short stay, in a Portugal under the Salazar dictatorship, he is arrested, imprisoned, and forced to leave the country, which leads him to relocate once again, this time to Tangier (Morocco).

1939 – In Tangier, he opens his own photography studio, devoted to portraits and all manner of social events. He also begins to collaborate with various Spanish publications, such as the newspaper, *España*, and the Institute of Political Studies in Madrid. Here he spends eight years, which he defines as “the happiest years of my life”.

In this period, he holds his first exhibitions in Tangier and in Madrid.

1947 – He moves to Madrid. He opens his studio on the Paseo de la Castellana and he attends intellectual debates in the city. The result of this is his exceptional series of portraits of Spanish artists and intellectuals. He travels around the country, taking photographs for iconic publications of the period, such as *Mundo Hispánico*.

1961 – He obtains Spanish nationality. His daughter Ana starts work at the studio as an assistant.

1966 – The exhibition *Clear Spain* is held, with a text from Azorín.

1966-67-68 – The collection *Imagen de España* (Editorial Clave) produces a series of books devoted to six Spanish regions.

1980 – He retires to Andrín (Asturias), leaving his photography studio in the hands of his daughter, Ana.

1985 – He exhibits at the Museo Jovellanos in Gijón, the first of many exhibitions that will showcase his signature work and which will eventually lead to his recognition as one of the great masters of humanist photography, with an unmistakable seal of identity.

1994 – He exhibits at the Spanish Museum of Contemporary Art (Madrid). As of this moment, his work travels to Argentina, Israel, France, Hungary, Morocco, among others.

2000 – He passes away in Llanes (Asturias, Spain).

The exhibition comprises 131 images, 27 belonging to the Museum of Fine Arts of Asturias, the rest are from the Ana Muller Fonds, with the collaboration of the Regional Archive of the Community of Madrid. Nicolás Muller Fonds.