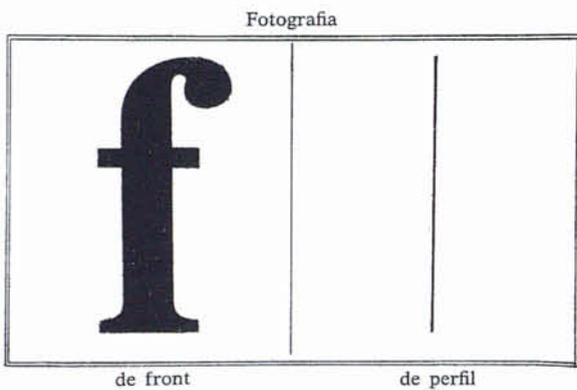


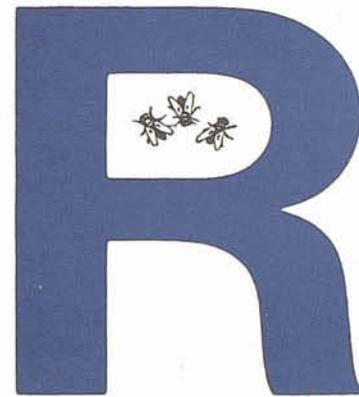
JOAN BROSSA, CONSTANT EXPERIMENT AND SURPRISE



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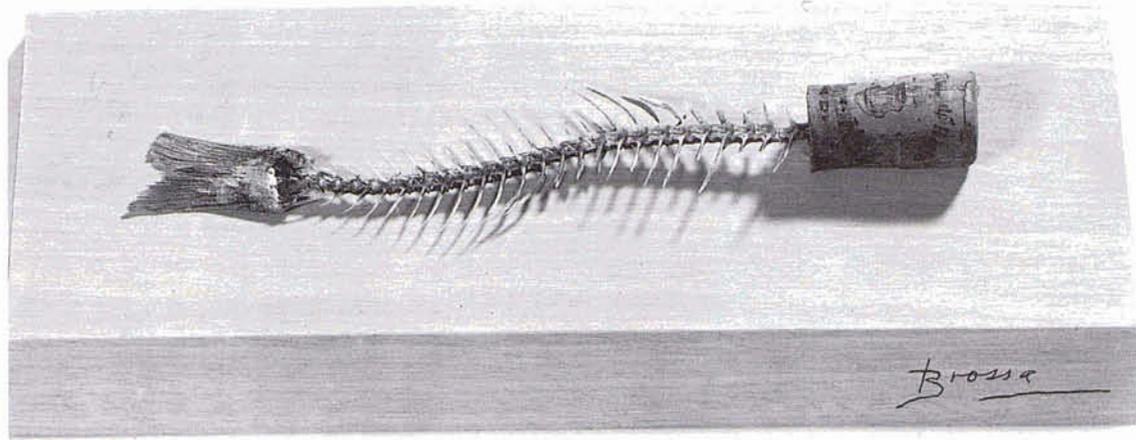
A A L'ESCAPARI. SERIGRAPHY 50 x 35 CM (1982)



R. SERIGRAPHY 35 x 50 CM (1982)

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JOAN BROSSA (BARCELONA, 1919) HAS MADE POETIC CREATION A FIELD OF CONSTANT EXPERIMENTATION. HIS PERMANENT ARTISTIC UNREST HAS BROUGHT HIS WORK INTO THE ORBIT OF THE INTERNATIONAL AVANT-GARDE MOVEMENTS OF THE LAST FIFTY YEARS.



ESPINA. OBJECT POEM (1983)

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Joan Brossa is the most genuinely avant-garde Catalan poet of this century. He has always been opposed to the dominant literary tradition and has defied convention in all fields. He has never restricted himself to a single form, but has experimented on all fronts, to the extent of trying things as far apart as visual sonnets, cybernetic sestinas, object poems or strip-tease. His restlessness has been permanent, because for him poetry is a constant process of searching, which has brought him into the orbit of the international avant-garde poetry movements of the last fifty years.

His beginnings can be placed in the forties, after the end of the Spanish civil war, in which he took part as a young man. His interest in Freudian psychology led him to write hypnagogic images, the product of dreams or states of unconsciousness. In his search for direction in this adventure of writing, a friend introduced him to J.V. Foix in 1941. In these early moments Foix was a true master for him, guiding that explosion of intuitive writing towards an understanding of traditional metric forms such as the sonnet, and introducing him to surrealism. In this way, Brossa gradually got to know the members of the ADLAN group, who before the war had synthesized in Catalonia

the findings of the different pre-war European avant-gardisms. Of particular importance were Joan Miró and Joan Prats, who provided him with a great deal of documentary material on surrealism. At the same time, Foix's advice helped him fit the isolated hypnagogic images into the rigid structure of the sonnet. In this way, the poems gained in elaboration and rhetoric, without renouncing the more strictly surrealist techniques, such as the association of very remote realities, startling effects, the phonetic games, chaotic enumerations, collages and breaks with syntax.

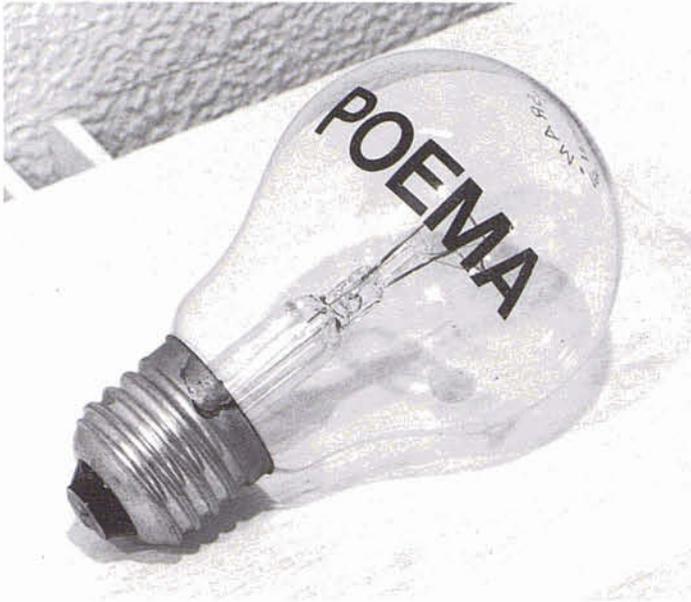
Brossa's contacts and friendships during those years were basically artistic. In 1947, he and a group of friends decided to produce a magazine, *Algol* (the name Arab astrologists give to the devil), with the clear intention of breaking with the atmosphere of those years. Another group of painters bought the magazine and between all of them they published a new one. At Brossa's suggestion, the magazine was called *Dau al Set*. Amongst the members of the group were the painters A. Tàpies, M. Cuixart, J. Ponç and J.J. Tharrats, the philosopher A. Puig and J. Brossa as poet. The publication was intended to open a new platform in what was a hermetic atmosphere. Within the postulates of sur-

realism, it combined an art and a literature that were essentially magic with fully up-to-date information on music and the visual arts which gave the magazine an international projection.

Brossa didn't only use surrealism to write sonnets. He also made use of the absurdities and the leaps in the void of popular literature to write romances. The result was *Romancets del Dragoli* (1948), a delightful book full of humour and irony, with elements closely tied to Brossa's personality, such as magic, card games, Carnival or the figure of Frègoli. After 1945 he also wrote plays along the purest Dadaist lines: meaningless dialogues, absurd theatre, invitations to the public to take part, etc., all providing a reflection on the validity of language in human communication.

After 1950, the course of Brossa's poetry changed. His friendship with the Brazilian consul and poet Joao Cabral de Melo led him to place greater value on everyday reality. His work became more political in its intention and he broke completely with traditional form.

The poems in *Em va fer Joan Brossa*, published in 1950, are vignettes of reality, stripped of all rhetoric, in a totally prosaic language. In a manner similar to that of *arte povera*, which A. Tàpies was beginning to practise at that time, the



POEMA. OBJECT POEM (1982)



JOAN BROSSA

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poet took reality and isolated it so that the reader could see it through new eyes and discover values in it which until then had remained hidden.

Brossa also showed his politico-social interests in odes, sonnets and plays with a more traditional structure. His denouncement of violence and the lack of freedom, his appeals for human solidarity and his roots in the land were to be the basis of the subject matter of many books during the fifties.

But alongside this interest in the world around him, there was also a conceptual interest which is insinuated in some definition-poems in *Em va fer*, but which is more obvious later in books from the turn of the sixties such as *El saltamarti* and *Poemes Civils*, and which consists in a reflection on the relationship between the significate and significant of the word. The poems are increasingly condensed, similar to traditional oriental poetry. This concentratedness increases their visual aspect until he reached a point where the poems started to contain pictures to make up for the shortcomings of language.

With this leap forward to pictures the poet came fully in line with the international experimental poetry of the fifties and sixties, especially concrete poetry and spatialism, which considered poetry and words material elements of

figuration. The word and the letter were to be the pillars of Joan Brossa's visual poetry in his search for the relation between words and objects, or with the object of making letters elementary carriers of a wide range of expressive significates. In this process of materializing poetry, the object in itself also came to form part of Brossa's forms of expression, first of all (Brossa's first object dates from 1943), with the same intention as *arte povera* –that is, of treasuring the things most looked down on and discovering the magic in the meanest object. But in a second period (especially, from the seventies on), the poet started manipulating objects in an attempt to penetrate their meaning or else to represent the concept. These objects, like the poems, are quite ordinary. And their appeal very often lies in the weight of the evidence and the contrast between the title and the unusual object the poet presents us with.

This conceptual path has led Brossa away from literature and introduced him into the world of visual art, but his poetic objective has remained unchanged. Over the years, the necessary presence of a receiver in his poetry has become increasingly evident. This has been underlined in his scenic poetry or theatre, in which, since the sixties, action-performance and other parathea-

trical genres such as musicals, strip-tease, and transformation monologues have become frequent, in a move to break down the borders between the arts.

But this has not been incompatible with more classical poetic forms like the *ses-tina*, a medieval metric form which he has continued to work at alongside the production of visual poems and objects. Its length has made it suitable for expressing the poet's social commitment during a decisive period (the years of the democratic transition in the Spanish state). But its complicated, repetitive form also makes it suitable for all sorts of games, and the poet has written alphabetical, numerical, musical, cybernetic, visual and conceptual *ses-tinas*.

Brossa's experimentation with all these forms confirms his poetic: the conception of poetry as a game, in which it is hoped that the other participant, the reader, will learn something about the world he lives in at the same time as he amuses himself. The means are varied, since the passage of time calls for a constant change of forms and a process of progressive synthesization and visualization. But in the background there has always been a restless man who has wanted to communicate with us and surprise us: Joan Brossa. ■