

The Josep Marimon i Vidal Photographic Collection of the National Archive of Catalonia

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Album with the contacts of 2,600 stereoscopic glass plates from the Josep Marimon i Vidal collection. In all the images, the author recorded the place and date the photograph was taken, which will make the work involved in describing the collection much easier. Photograph: F. Sánchez

In 2007, the collection of the amateur photographer Josep Marimon was included in the ANC's collection to begin the donation process to the Government of Catalonia. The collection consists of 2,800 6x13 stereoscopic plate negatives, 134 6x13 stereoscopic autochromes, 250 paper positives (predominantly silver bromide and bromoil and bromoil transfer pigmentation processes), an album with 2,721 contacts of the stereoscopic plate negatives and 437 black and white glass slides (predominantly 6x13 stereoscopic, but also 13x18, 10x15 and 9x12). The collection also comprises a collection of 90 calling cards, 46 stereoscopic positives and 70 postcards from the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, all collected by the author, most of which are portraits of family members.

Josep Marimon, an amateur photographer in his time

Josep Marimon i Vidal was born in Esparreguera (a town about 40 kilometres north of Barcelona) in 1879 and died in Barcelona in 1942. His family background is unknown. In all probability he came from a well-to-do family, he only had one sister, Matilde. Although he was married, he had no children and died at the age of 63, without issue, his legacy being a magnificent photographic collection which he bequeathed to his sister's grandchildren, Joseph and Joan Rodón i Marimon.



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From his hometown, he moved to Barcelona, where he lived until he died. Despite this change of residence, he never lost contact with the region where he was born, and he used to spend his summers in a farmhouse in the village of Jorba. The result of all this is a large number of photographs of this town from the 1920s and 1930s. In Barcelona he worked professionally as a sales representative for a department store in the city.

As the Catalan photographer Francesc Roca explains in his memoirs¹, in the last few decades of the nineteenth century and at the beginning of the twentieth, the photography world was divided into "photographers" and "portrait-makers". The first group was comprised of rich amateur photographers, with considerable purchasing power, as well as a knowledge of chemistry and optics; the other group, the "portrait-makers", were what we would actually call photographers nowadays, and who strived to earn a living through photography. Thanks to them, many people could have photographs (of themselves or of a family member) taken, and more economically than through a painter. Our man was in the first group.

We do not know for certain when Josep Marimon started out as an amateur in the photography world. However, from his photographic collection, and thanks to a postcard written by Marimon himself, we know that the influence of his brother Pere Rodón, also an amateur photographer, was important. It is a postcard of the Jorba-Igualada road taken by Marimon in 1910. On the back of the postcard, Marimon wrote the following lines to his brother-in-law:

"(...) I hope you send me what I am asking you for soon, because I really want to work in photography, as the

more I do the more I like it. Let me know whether the bromide and sun ones have to be developed and fixed in the same way (...)

In fact, after a preliminary study, and once the collection had been processed, 173 negative gelatine and silver plates on glass made by Pere Rodón have been identified. They are photographs dating from 1900 to 1920, portraits of groups of people, gatherings and outings, most of them taken in different parts of the region of Anoia, all of them unidentified.

However, it was in Barcelona, as a result of his contact with the Photography Section of the Centre Excursionista de Catalunya (SF-CEC) (Hiking Centre of Catalonia) and of the Agrupació Fotogràfica de Catalunya (AFC) (Photographic Association of Catalonia), where he improved and furthered his interest and skills in the photography world. He was a member of both of them and harnessed his photographic activity through them. His relationship with these organisations from Barcelona was crucial in his photographic creation.

The Agrupació Fotogràfica de Catalunya and the Centre Excursionista de Catalunya, photographic association reference points

The decade of the 1920s was marked, in photography, by the mass creation of new photographic associations and specialist publications, in which Josep Marimon participated actively, as has already been noted. Similarly, and as the historian S. Carl King² stated, the convergence of different cultural, economic and social factors in Barcelona between 1915 and 1920 generated an environment that heightened interest in photography: the rapid expansion of the middle class, an active pub-

General view of what are currently the Maria Cristina and Rius i Taulet avenues in Montjuïc. First of all, particular mention should be made of the probable building work on the Palace of Alfonso XIII and, in the background, four columns also designed by the architect and president of the Commonwealth of Catalonia, Josep Puig. The picture corresponds to a 6x13 stereoscopic glass plate and was taken in 1921.

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lishing industry, particularly in photography, and the founding of the AFC, which acted as a model for the creation of other photographic associations throughout Spain.

The AFC was created in Barcelona in 1923, its founding members including Joaquim Pla Janini and Claudi Carbonell, whose influence is evident in the work of Marimon, as will be explained later. The Association provided its members with information on international exhibitions and encouraged them to participate in such activities.

Josep Marimon joined the AFC on 8 May 1928 through John Xicart and Salvador Lluch, both of them founders of the AFC, together with Janini and Carbonell, also members of the SF-CEC: his membership card lists him as member number 82. In 1931 he became part of the board as a voting member of the culture sec-

tion. His work was published in several issues of the AFC newsletter in the late 1920s and early 1930s. It should be pointed out that at the beginning of the 1930s the AFC newsletter was one of the best photography magazines published in Spain, although it was only distributed to members of the association.

The first news we have of Josep Marimon's involvement with the SF-CEC are from 1923; he was a voting member on the board in 1926. This period also heralded the beginning of the creation of the Photographic Archive of the Centre Excursionista de Catalunya, which contains photographs taken by him.

Josep Marimon was an active member of both organisations. He participated in many of the activities and photography courses they organised. Mention must be made of the awards obtained in the pigmentation categories at the





1st Fill d'A. Busquets i Duran Photography Competition organised by the AFC in 1927; in the 6th Annual Competition of the AFC in the bromides and autochromes category in 1930; the 8th Annual Competition of the AFC in 1932; the 9th Annual Competition of the AFC in 1933 and the grand prize at the Catalonia Today Historical Exhibition, organised under the auspices of the City Council of Barcelona in 1935.

The January 1932 edition of the Foto³ photography magazine dedicated an article to his prize-winning works in the AFC's 8th Annual Competition:

"(...) In Plain Photography, where the technical errors that sometimes crept into previous events have been eradicated, we particularly liked: (...) Gypsy camp, Town slums and the Vine, three bromoils by Jose Marimon which show him to be an excellent bromoilist, and which are also endowed with remarkably good taste in terms of composition (...)."

He was also awarded the gold medal in the Catalonia Award in the 6th Photo Competition of the Centre Excursionista de Catalunya in 1930. Referring to this award, the February 6, 1930 issue of *La Veu de Catalunya*⁴ dedicated this article to him, which we transcribe verbatim:

"(...) Mr. Marimon, with his characteristic modesty, has suddenly attained the aura of an excellent capturer of photographic aspects with admirable knowledge of Daguerre's art. His photographs are the perfect marriage of technique and conception; the author has made the most of the photographic document and lights, which are difficult to bring together (...)."

(...) in this competition Mr. Marimon has also exhibited his knowledge of artistic photography in the most expressive sense of the word. Two collections were submitted to qualify for the Special award within the

Catalonia Prize, of which Mr. Marimon was also the lucky winner. His collection of art photographs, modulated with the skill that pigmentation procedures permit, denote an extensive knowledge and a clear vision of the road the author has to follow to achieve truly artistic work within the difficult art of photography (...).

He also presented his work at many national and international photography exhibitions. A few are highlighted below: 1st International Show of 1929 organised by the AFC, where he was awarded first prize in the bromides category, International Exhibition of Uruguay, 1930; International Show of Buenos Aires, 1930; 8th International Photography Show of Madrid, 1930; 3rd International Exhibition of Holland, 1930; 4th International Photography Show of Japan; 25th International Photographic Art Show of Paris, 1930; 6th International Photography Show of the Photographic Society of Zaragoza, 1930; Tarragona International Show, 1931; and the 13th International Show of Photographic Art, Brussels 1931. His photographs also illustrate the reference manual of the times, by Manuel Vallvé *Tratado moderno de fotografía*, published in 1935.

His work: straddling art and document

The defining characteristics of the topics of Josep Marimon's work are the predominance of the landscape, and, to a lesser degree, customs and manners and documentary-type images. From the point of view of what geography has called *cultural hiking*, the subjects that appear are those typical of the time: the discovery of the country and the recovery of its heritage. There is an abundance of pictures of la Molina, Montseny, or Catalonia's most famous monuments: Poblet, Santes Creus, Sant Cugat del Vallès, Sant Joan de les Abadesses, etc. Particularly outstanding is the

Two bromide photos, a procedure used by Josep Marimon which won him several competitions.

In the top photograph the author applied a soft focus to blur the picture and thus obtain a more pictorial setting, unlike the bottom one, which is more documentary in nature. The first photograph won the Grand Prize, in the bromides category, in the Catalonia Today Historical Exhibition, organised under the auspices of the City Council of Barcelona in 1935; the other photo won the first prize, also in the bromides category, at the Sixth Annual Competition of the Agrupació Fotogràfica de Catalunya in 1930.

The scene shows fishermen working on the beach of Caldes d'Estrac (Caldetes) in 1926. CAT/ ANC-1-802 cr. 106.970, and CAT/ ANC-1-802 cr. 106.971.



report on the occasion of the restoration of the monastery of Sant Joan de les Abadesses in 1924 and the Universal Exposition of Barcelona in 1929. In addition, and just like any other photographer, Josep Marimon never passed up the opportunity to capture his immediate environment, such as the Mountain of Montjuic and the first football match in the stadium on the same mountain in 1921, as well as people working in the country in Jorba or pictures of family and friends.

Of his early positive images on paper, the bromides deserve special mention, belonging, from the aesthetic point of view, to pictorialism and characterized by the use of *soft focus*

applied to the lens of the amplifier and paper negatives. In addition, the widespread use of pigment techniques, such as bromoil and bromoil transfer, procedures he eventually mastered, is also noteworthy. In this regard, his work is similar to that of two of his contemporaries, and probably acquaintances, from the AFC, Joaquim Pla Janini and Claudi Carbonell.

The pigmentation processes enabled the author to work on the final image to remove troublesome details, emphasise highlights or introduce brush strokes - procedures that are apparently contradictory to documentary practice. Marimon, however, also used them to afford the photograph an added value rather





than as a way of denying this reality, which is after all the raw material of the image. Josep Vidal Marimon's images convey the interests of the photographer and his time, and give us a portrait of the enlightened petit bourgeois who, until the outbreak of the Civil War, travelled the country to rediscover Catalan heritage. This portrait has the added value of its

author's artistic quality, as is endorsed by the awards and prizes he picked up in the course of his life.

The discovery of the Josep Marimon i Vidal photographic collection, hitherto completely unknown, is a major find for the history of Catalan photography and cultural hiking.

Notes:

1. Català i Roca Francesc (1995). *Impressions d'un fotògraf. Memòries*. Barcelona: Edicions 62. 198 p.
2. King, Sir Carl (winter-spring 2000). *El impresionismo fotográfico en España*. "Archivos de la fotografía" Vol. 4, no 1, pp. 88-89.
3. *Photo. Publicación mensual ilustrada de arte técnica e información fotográficas* (Barcelona: 1928-1932). It was created by José Pérez Noguera, an amateur photographer. Like its director, the magazine has a marked pictorialist tendency, like many of his colleagues, including José Arola Sala, J. Ortiz Echagüe and the art critic José Fernández.
4. *La Veu de Catalunya* was the longest-lasting daily newspaper in Catalan. It was published in Barcelona from 30 July 1880 until 8 January 1937.