

IMAGINARY PORTRAIT OF 24 UNIVERSAL GENIUSES OF TODAY (1981), Jesús Carles de Vilallonga

This is the fifth and final stop on the Public Art, Science and Technology tour.

The painting hangs on the westerly wall towering over the lecture hall. The painting's five clusters of machine-like figures illuminate the theme of art and technology. On the left, the figures stand in unison like a Greek chorus, while in the middle, an acrobatic dancer protrudes and fuses the other figures together. This massive work is best experienced from the opposite wall, so if you are able to, we encourage you to position yourself at the back.

Born in Spain in 1927, Vilallonga's world-renowned career spanned over 6 decades. He was trained at the École des Beaux-Arts in Paris, exhibiting in galleries across Europe, Canada, and the United States. He often took inspiration from the artistic communities of Quebec and Catalonia — his two homes.

Originally a sketch produced in 1979, the painting grew to become one of Vilallonga's largest and most ambitious works. *Imaginary Portrait* is a massive, fantastical portrait of a group of people who Vilallonga perceived to be the brightest intellectual, scientific, cinematic, and artistic minds of the twentieth century. A style which is abundant with ornamental patterns and monumental qualities, Vilallonga's canvas represents luminaries such as the painters Marc Chagall and Salvador Dali, the dancer Maia Plisetskaya, the feminist philosopher Simone de Beauvoir, and the actress Bette Davis. Amidst these artists and intellectuals, Vilallonga prominently placed an astronaut from the Apollo mission team. (A complete list of the figures is located on the wall opposite the painting where they are mapped out in a diagram. The list is also available on the website, take a minute to pause this tour and explore the list on the wall or online, — do you admire any of Villalonga's geniuses too?)

At the stage of inception, Vilallonga had no specific genius in mind. It was only through outlining and sketching these abstract figures that the geniuses were chosen. In other words, Villalonga's artistic research and inspiration evolved through the painting process.

This curious arrangement of machine-like figures begs the question: is this painting also a reflection of twentieth-century technological anxiety? Or does Vilallonga's visual homage aim to provide beauty, hope, and trust in the future — fittingly placed in an educational institution? Save for a few individuals, the "geniuses" in the work are primarily European, so just how universal is this worldview? Perhaps answers about the future lie in visual excavations of the past — a process undertaken daily by the students who sit in this very auditorium.

This concludes the Public Art, Science and Technology tour. Continue the audio-guided tours with the Public Art, Public Memory tour or the Public Art, Nature and the City tour.