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ENG

XABIER MORRÁS

**KUTXA
FUNDA
ZIOA**



Xabier Morrás

Paths that take time, long journeys, patience and perseverance to work through themes that continue to matter, a depth of vision, a broad perspective, this is the perspective we need. Beyond the ephemeral, the instantaneous, the superficial, the effect, the surprise, the fragmented, the speed of scrolling and channel surfing that characterises the digital world, in the face of all this, pausing, engrossed attention, a slow journey, an alert gaze, calm reading, depth and time, a lot of time, adding time to each of our actions. This is the essence of *Xabier Morrás*, an exhibition that brings together both parallel and intersecting conversations between artists—Xabier Morrás and myself in curatorial tasks—and, on the other hand, between Xabier and society.

Xabier Morrás displays characteristics that are difficult to define precisely because of his interdisciplinarity. He is a universal, unclassifiable artist: painter, researcher, educator and cultural facilitator... and that means an open and multifaceted perspective on his work. Joaquim Dols discusses all of this in the magnificent text contained in the catalogue that accompanies this exhibition. For my part, the proposal developed for the Kutxa Fundazioa Kubo gallery contains a dialectic approach. The exhibition display thus becomes a conversation, a self-reinforcing system, with the project emerging from within, from the painter's studio. It is not a historian's thesis, but rather an open, sincere and unpressured conversation, within his own workspace and universe, and key themes emerge in the course of this conversation, what truly matters to Xabier Morrás, what drives him to work every day, and what transforms his life and that of his family into a unique, coherent and, above all, sincere project.

Those of us who inhabit studios know that a project like this can only develop in the intimacy of these unique spaces, within a favourable environment created over the years, where experiences accumulate that permeate the walls, disappearing for a time and then reappearing unexpectedly when opening a folder, picking up a piece of paper or some old forgotten photographs, or moving a painting. The paintings, drawings, models and installations by Xabier Morrás that feature in this exhibition emerge from this magma, from this latent volcano, from this magical, vital space where thousands of ideas accumulate that may never see the light—or perhaps they will—waiting for the right moment, for a chance discovery. Studios should be understood as spaces that generate ideas, in constant flux. A certain curatorial practice tends to turn all manner of materials produced by the actions of artists into museum pieces, subjecting them to historical analysis. Displaying them in cabinets apparently dignifies everything, imbuing them with symbolism and added value they do not possess, until distorting their very essence, cataloguing pieces and elevating them to a place they do not deserve. Many of these materials must naturally be accepted as simply part of the process, nothing more. Nevertheless, they are fundamental to understanding the genesis of ideas and their subsequent realisation. They help us to understand the decisions of artists, their successes, as well as their mistakes, their limitations, their clumsiness or lack of skill. They provide an in-depth insight into artists, their triumphs, as well as their woes.

This proposal aims to somehow draw the public into Xabier Morrás' studio, inviting them to explore his unique universe and understanding the way he works, his style, his narrative, his apparent chaos, his ingenuity, what goes on in his mind, his intellectual nourishment, what he reads, his hobbies, his research and his creative model. In short, rather than simply presenting his reworked and ordered work (though it does that to some extent), this exhibition delves into its essence, into its genesis: the moment when an image takes shape in his mind, when he thinks through drawing, when a theme recurs and evolves, when a painting is revisited and transformed many years later—in other words, an exhibition to immerse us in his creative process. Not moving backwards, but rather inwards.

Although we could conduct a historical, linearly continuous analysis linked to his biography and successive themes that he deals with, this apparent continuity is shattered by his painting practice. His recurring thematic references are difficult to maintain within the framework of a certain discursive linearity. They appear and disappear intermittently,



Mockup for *Manhattan Flesh*, 1971
Cardboard, paper and ink, 53 x 166 x 45 cm
Artist's Collection

like periodic flashes that propel us in all directions, resurfacing with renewed force from apparent oblivion. His work is nevertheless somehow “embedded” in his biography, and although the temporal allocation of his practice sometimes contradicts this, in the words of Xabier: “this social and genetic legacy has shaped an important part of my artistic creation.”

His mother was born in Zabaldika and his father in Lakar, Navarre, making Xabier Morrás the first generation of his family to be born in Pamplona. Despite this, he has always maintained a deep connection with the rural world from which his family came, shaping his own special way of being and existing.

He was attracted to drawing and painting from an early age, attending the School of Arts and Crafts in Pamplona regularly, with books and magazines completing his initial introduction to art and subsequent trips to Paris and Madrid confirming this interest and commitment to his artistic pursuits. At sixteen, he discovered affinities with the work of Antoni Tàpies and European Informalism in general, especially France’s Jean Fautrier, but by the age of twenty-two he had delved deeper into the work of Robert Rauschenberg, specifically his incorporation of photographs into his paintings. Even during these years, he displayed a strong interest in social issues, the Spanish Civil War, particularly vicious in Navarre, the Indochina War, the Algerian War and the Iron Curtain: “the photographs coming out of Vietnam were mind-blowing, degrading and inconceivable”, and this prompted him to explore these themes in his work and to conclude: “I responded to these various wounds through painting.”

Londres [London] series / In 1966, he moved to London with the support of a grant from the Navarre Provincial Council. Apart from the pictorial influence of Francis Bacon, whom he met, he was also profoundly impacted by the artist Gerd Winner, and it was from this mix with photographic reality that his unique pictorial approach emerged, proposing a way of painting that transcends the surface of the canvas. At this point, his work assumed true three-dimensionality: planes broke down, were cut out, superimposed and intersected. His paintings overflowed the surface and reconstructed measured spaces, a kind of sequence of overlapping planes occurred that recreated real distances. What emerged was a physical depth and linguistic fusion between photography, painting and real earthy textures. Morrás worked with the reality of London and the landscape of its docks, using the combined languages of photography and tactile reality that he incorporated into his paintings, where space multiplies and intrudes between the planes of a surface that he imbues with volume.

A scenography that integrates us into the reality of what we see, the power of signs emanating from monuments to colonial domination, as well as the symbols of the power of large corporations and multinationals that stifle the individual. Grey lives blurred and lost in the confusion of the large metropolis. East London of its docks: leaden streets; dirty, wet brick; sinister warehouses concealing alienated experiences. An expression in the face of horror.

Pamplona Encounters 1972 / From his London series, the two-dimensional pictorial plane was shattered and the concept of expanded painting took shape in his installation in the Museum of Navarre's courtyard during the legendary Pamplona Encounters of 1972, organised by the Huarte family and curated by the painter José Luis Alexanco and the musician Luis de Pablo. Morrás provided a new, powerful, provocative and critical aesthetic to a crushed and "gagged" social reality. The installation comprised various elements surrounding the central figure of *Cristo amordazado*¹ [Gagged Christ], guarded by two upright figures representing decorated, proud national police officers², all of whom were located in a dark, gloomy chapel, surrounded by a metal scaffolding structure that evokes a large cross, encircled by a textile tape, recalling the iconography of the descent from the cross. Two cut-out figures of various installation workers above

¹ The image of Gregorio Hernandez's *Cristo yacente* [Recumbent Christ], 1625-1627. Polychrome wood. Prado Museum, on loan to the National Sculpture Museum in Valladolid. ² Based on photos taken during the Holy Week procession in Zamora, 1963.



Monumento a la guerra de Crimea [Crimean War Monument], 1968
Mixed media: photograph on paper mounted on copper sheet,
screenprint on paper, oil and cement on board, 128 x 126 x 15 cm
Artist's Collection

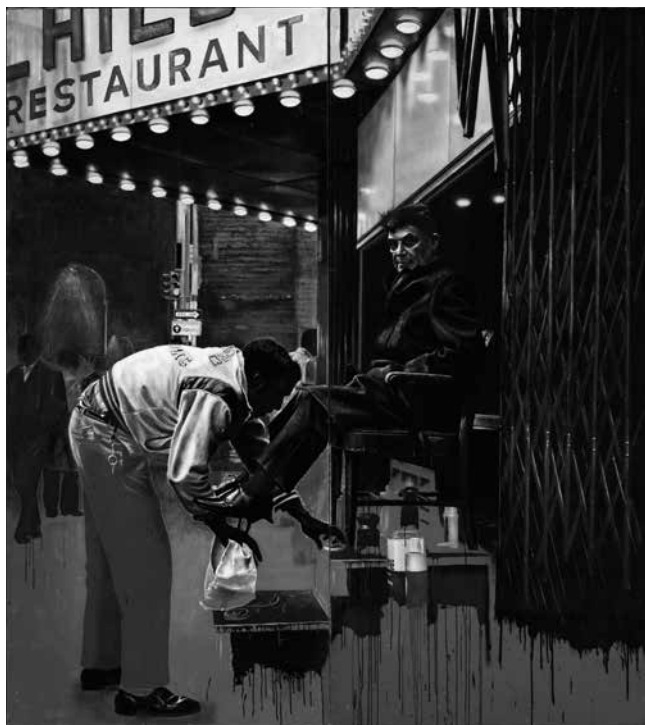


Detail of the installation *Cristo amordazado*
[Gagged Christ], Museum of Navarre, 2026

crown the ensemble, thereby integrating the act of assembly into the work itself. But this initial idea could not be realised in these circumstances, because once the piece had been constructed, and given the provocative nature of its concept, the art critic and coordinator of the Basque art exhibition, Santiago Amón, suggested to Morrás that a significant part of the installation should be removed: the elements referring to de facto powers of the Franco regime. The atmosphere was already tense and there were fears that the government might suspend the Encounters, so Xabier, heeding the requests from the organisers, decided at the last minute to replace part of the original iconography with a less incendiary piece: *El encierro* [The Running of the Bulls].

Sixty-four years have passed waiting for its moment, and in this exhibition the *Cristo amordazado* work has been reconstructed for the first time in its entirety since its creation, in its true and complete arrangement, as conceived by the artist for the Pamplona Encounters in 1972. And although it has been installed on other occasions in various configurations, these have always presented the piece in a partial, “mutilated” manner.

Nueva York [New York] series / In 1973 he inaugurated an exhibition at the prominent Iolas Velasco gallery in Madrid (now defunct), an exhibition in which he showed us what had already been hinted at in *Cristo amordazado*. Through an expanded installation system in the gallery, Morrás deployed a whole arsenal of new pictorial, photographic, object-based and spatial resources to bravely and starkly address urgent issues of the time. These included the iron grip of the Franco regime's system and the social pressure exerted by the army and the church as guarantors of a fascist ideological system imposed by force of arms, as seen in his *España* [Spain] series, as well as the anonymity and disintegration of individuals absorbed by the great metropolis, as seen in his *Nueva York* series. This latter installation has been reconstructed for this exhibition.



N.Y. 42th Street II, 1983
Oil on canvas, 240 x 200 cm
Pamplona City Council Contemporary Art Collection

In that magnificent exhibition, Morrás employed an installation system that would today be called “immersive”, with photographic enlargements on panels from floor to ceiling, where viewers could move freely among the pieces and immerse themselves in the powerful impact of their scale and the dramatic starkness of black and white. The omnipresent figure of a New Yorker from the then-squalid 42nd Street challenges us with his tense, half-astonished, half-provocative gaze, although also frightened and annoyed by the invasion of his world, his sphere of personal independence, a defender of his anonymity. A figure who makes us feel uncomfortable yet attracts us—we cannot help but look into his eyes and wonder who he is, what he is doing, what is wrong with him—as he draws us into the installation and prevents us from escaping. This gaze would haunt Xabier Morrás for years, reappearing and disappearing like other recurring themes that come and go, old paintings that remain active are retouched, reinterpreted, transformed or extinguished in the practical maelstrom of the continuous process. A visceral, compulsive way of doing things and revisiting themes to update them, even if their formal definition, language or technique has changed.

Expolio [Spoliation] series / Although Morrás is attracted to large metropolises, he does not lose sight of a familiar, domestic reality etched in his mind ever since his childhood experiences. In his Expolio series, inspired by the reality of Navarre, he alerts us to the disappearance of an immaterial heritage, an intangible legacy of a unique way of being in the world: “a medium that I know, that makes me suffer, that I see how it has been degraded, deserted, becoming a cemetery; those elderly people with weathered, formidable faces, the imprint of life, all that wisdom, all that love for a job well done, which is now the past, history (...), that has not withstood the onslaught of modern times and that is there, dying, and I am left with nothing, saddened, empty.” The Castaño installation is symptomatic of all this, recreating a rural setting laden with references to forsaken, vanished tasks, animals and people from another era, coexisting among us until very recently, but now impossible to recover. It is not a return to nostalgia, but rather a critique of oblivion, of uprooting.

Art as a collective catharsis for a lost reality, a form of painting as an “anthropological methodology” that connects us to the past and teaches us ways of facing a future.



En algún lugar de Navarra [Somewhere in Navarra], 1977–2018
Screenprint, oil, and acrylic on panel, 274 x 300 cm
Artist's Collection

Xabier Morrás addresses the issue from more than just a pictorial perspective. In his doctoral thesis, “Destrucción de la arquitectura vernácula de Navarra” [Destruction of the Vernacular Architecture of Navarra], he provides a detailed analysis of Navarrese rural architecture—it could almost be called its death certificate—in its gradual and accelerated abandonment, transformation and irreparable loss.



New York Central System II, 2013
 Watercolor and pastel on paper, 135 x 150 cm
 Artist's Collection

Homenaje al arquitecto desconocido [Homage to the Unknown Architect] / An exhibition of this name was presented in 2002 at the Citadel of Pamplona's Mixed Pavilion and Juan Bravo Cultural Centre in Madrid where architecture took centre stage: New York, London, Chicago, Buffalo, Moscow, Berlin, Helsinki, astonishing buildings of superhuman scale, imbued with toxic atmospheres and adverse weather conditions. Architectures of power, architectures of the system. Signs of a glorious past now diminished, anachronistic, grim, paralysed, overwhelming.... All obscured by a turbid, blurred and dirty cloud that envelops us... unsettling, disturbing.

In Morrás' work, in his alchemy that transforms it all, everything also moves. They are places where significant events have unfolded or terrible situations have taken place, situations of intransigence, incomprehension, abandonment, rawness, struggle. They are places where time passes, memory remains: train stations, people in transit or in full flight, coming and going, where stories follow one another, where he invites us to imagine the protagonists of impossible narratives, interesting, timeless films. Why do they travel? Where do they come from? What has happened there? What do they expect from a new place? What have they left behind? Or what memories trouble them?

Cities belonging to no one, offering no refuge, hostile, threatening... Cinematic characters waiting, leaning on bridge railings, looking, searching, crying, waiting for someone or something, or simply remaining still, forsaken, wondering what to do, where to go. Film settings, atmospheres that shape events, situations, climaxes, places to retreat to, to hide in, to escape from, places that overwhelm, engage and identify us, against which we cannot remain unmoved, with characters who keep staring at us, settings of lived experiences, walls that exude stories, images that we cannot forget.

Xabier Morrás finds the transcendent in the everyday, the important in the simple, that talent for connecting events, for creating a suggestive world of fantastical, certain connections, for example, from the sensitive world of 19th-century painting to the texture of everyday materials, from the power of Soviet architecture from the 1930s or from the labyrinth of New York to Chilean nitrate metal signs in any town in Navarre, from the aggressiveness of painting to its meticulous execution. A way of intertwining a unity of thought.

His commitment to painting is no coincidence, for it stems from his ideological stance of art as something that integrates. It is the history of how we approach things, how we preserve the memory of life, the memory of place and a profound conviction in the possibility of painting, born from someone who has already returned, from someone who has travelled along experimental paths, has incorporated new procedures, has pondered and grown with photography, has inhabited the domains of installation, of conceptual art, etc. All these experiences have taught him to create images and build memory, mechanisms to return us to the past and what remains unfinished, questioning what we know, where we are and what we think, why we are like that and how things could have been.

Throughout his long career, Xabier Morrás has acquired a humanism that blossoms in each of his works, whether it is the loss and disappearance of architectural or ethnographic heritage, the consequences of wars and totalitarian regimes, the dissolution of the individual in large urban agglomerations, loss or detachment without reference points. He is ultimately driven by his interest in and concern for all things profoundly human. Morrás is interested in everything pertaining to people: what stirs our consciences, what moves us, the irresistible struggle for all that escapes us, bygone practices now obsolete and impossible to recover, completely out of context. Not from a simplistic nostalgia, but rather from

the perspective of someone who has lived through the cause of that collapse and has a profound understanding gleaned from a comparative analysis of what was, what is, what we remember, what we were told, what we must do and how we must do it.

A work that challenges, provokes and wounds us. Vast metropolises, buildings on a grand scale, factories like infernal machines, the big city as a backdrop to indifference, loss, uncertainty and, above all, forsakenness, a world that is disappearing, a forgotten aesthetic, a heavy slab of loneliness and uprooting. Xabier Morrás' work shows us powerful architecture that crushes us and makes us feel insignificant, mere shadows on a dirty, wet floor, dissolving into the lightness of toxic fog. A body of work that speaks to us of displacement, of anonymity, but above all of wounded humanism, blurred and dissolving; of an absent, exhausted, finished memory. And yet, through an active and positive approach, without drama, he continues to pursue beauty, salvaging that which endures for the future from the ruins, a sublime aesthetic, a beautiful soul, in Xabier's words: "They are paintings of my memory, aimed at collective memory."

A type of painting—that of Xabier Morrás—that is an act of resistance, the documentary archive of a reality in which people disappear into diluted humanity, an irretrievable memory of worn-out figures, lost in an urban labyrinth, without Ariadne's thread to help them escape, without any shelter to protect themselves, heal and recover. A type of painting for today.

Jesus Mari Lazkano

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Xabier Morrás

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Education
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Kulturalak

Insurance
Axa Art

Printing
Gráficas Lorea

Mediation

Guided tours

Every Saturday at 17:30 in Basque and 18:30 in Spanish
Free admission, prior booking on the website

Saturday, November 7, 11:30 am – 1:30 pm

Harribitxi, a family workshop with Tripak

For children aged 6-12 (accompanied by an adult)

In Basque

5 euros per participant (free for adults)

Prior booking on the website

Public Programme

Saturdays 7 and 21 November, 12 December 2026
and 9 January 2027 at 6.30 pm

Guided tours with Xabier Morrás

Spanish

Free admission, prior booking on the website

Thursday 14 January 2027 at 6.30 pm, Kutxa Fundazioa Kubo

Conversations with the artist Xabier Morrás and the art theorist,

curator and professor Simón Marchán Fiz. Chair: Jesus Mari Lazkano

Spanish

Free admission, prior booking on the website

Thursday 26 November 2026 at 6.30 pm, Kutxa Fundazioa Kubo

Presentation of the documentary short film *Encuentros con Xabier*, with the team from 601 Producciones Audiovisuales

Spanish

Free admission, prior booking on the website

Thursday 17 December 2026 at 6.30 pm, Kutxa Fundazioa Kubo

**Presentation of *Los Encuentros de Pamplona en el contexto de la Sala de Cultura de la Caja de Ahorros de Navarra (CAN)*, with Javier Balda,
and Screening of *Encuentros 72, Pamplona*, José Antonio Sistiaga, 1972,
51' 16mm [digital transfer]. © J.A. Sistiaga, VEGAP, Donostia, 2026**

Spanish

Free admission, prior booking on the website

Information

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Opening hours

From Tuesday to Sunday

12:00 – 14:00

16:00 – 20:00

Free
entry