

# Ignasi Aballí

## *Cinzento/Grey/Gris*

EN version

GALERIA VERA CORTÊS is delighted to announce 'Cinzento/Grey/Gris', Ignasi Aballí's first solo exhibition at the gallery.

The exhibition at Galeria Vera Cortês marks the return of Aballí to Portugal and is an opportunity to discover one of the most prominent Spanish artists of his generation, having represented Spain at the Venice Biennale in 2022 and presented solo exhibitions at Museo Nacional Centro Reina Sofia, Serralves Museum, and Instituto Valenciano de Arte Moderno.

Ignasi Aballí's work is a constant challenge to the viewer's attention and perception. Using strategies characteristic of conceptual art, which include text, found images, archives, and documents, his projects subvert the distinctions between artistic genres such as painting, literature, photography, installation, film, and video.

The exhibition, with curatorial text by Spanish researcher Marta Azparran, opens on Thursday 23 January between 8 and 10pm.

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«Ellos sienten del mismo modo que yo que están agotados.  
¡Los ojos, sí, los ojos!...»<sup>1</sup>

We are born in grey.

The first colour we see in our life is grey, the *Eigengrau* ("intrinsic grey" in German), that non-colour we discern when our eyes are closed. The term was coined by philosopher Gustav Theodor Fechner, who, in fact, was blinded by looking too much at the sun in his research on colour perception. The *Eigengrau* he named is not exactly a colour since it does not respond to an external stimulus, it is rather an hallucination generated by our brains to fill the unbearable emptiness of having nothing to look at. The "intrinsic grey" is what we saw until we opened our eyes for the first time.

1 Paul Cézanne (Doran Michael (ed.), *Gesprache mit Cézanne. Sobre Cézanne. Conversaciones y testimonios.*

In the work *Meadow Report* (2021) by artist Marine Hugonnier, the camera records details of Monet's gardens in Giverny until it stops in front of the Japanese bridge which appears in many of the painter's works. There, and at a decisive point, the artist removes the lens from the camera. As she does so, the whole landscape in those gardens with the bridge in the background becomes a mass of greyish, pasty blue. As if the landscape and reality in short, entered the camera without the mediation of the lens, undifferentiated, without form or event, without nuance. Just like the world of the anecdotal arrived with photography and cinema and their lenses, - as Peter Sloterdijk argues in his book on grey -, we intuit Hugonnier's gesture, of separating the lens from the body of her camera and letting the mass of grey of the indistinct enter it, as the founding act of the contemporary gaze.

That is the gesture shared by Ignasi Aballí here, to remove our lens. Because nothing represents us now better than the undifferentiated, the grey zone of the neutral spaces that red, black, blue leave open, of the frontiers between countries/colours, of the frontiers between ideologies/colours (because every party struggle is multicoloured but the state is always grey); the shapeless grey, leaden and dense mass of contemporaneity, with its false dream of equality which has become the midpoint. Ignasi takes the lens away lest the detail of the image hold us, because grey is also the colour of the weariness of images.

The *Eigengrau* is nothing other than that grey interruption from which we look at all that is visible. Each blink of an eye is a pause in-grey, cleaning our gaze in small intervals so that we may continue to contemplate. Our intrinsic grey is the a priori of all possible images. That undifferentiated blind zone that allows us to distinguish when we are awake and when we are asleep; a conscious grey curtain rising above all interior and exterior images and drawn back every time we feel the desire to look. It allows us to discern what we call reality from the rest, even if that is also an image. Aballí's work here is a blinking into this intrinsic grey, an infinitely small interval in which we interrupt the image; that is the moment we aspire to, the one that allows us to look at the images again while being aware that we are looking at them, that brown sweep of distance where we await the image to-come.

Monet, the tireless painter of those gardens captured by Hugonnier, became almost blind in his final years. In order to continue to paint, he arranged the colours on his palette systematically so as to combine them according to a code learned through years of practice; alike the pictorial version of the deaf composer, the same shared language. If Monet had lived a few more decades, and noting the path to abstraction of his last works (in which we do not know to what extent he painted his blindness), we wonder if he would have ended up covering his canvases with the same pasty, undifferentiated mass with which Marine Hugonnier condensed up his Giverny garden.

Ignasi Aballí, akin to that last semi-blind Monet, or even the impossible Monet of the future, proposes something similar: the colours as signs of a language already known and exhausted. The score we can all perform by ear, where the code (be it number or letter) replaces the colour, just as the writing of a note replaces the sound in the head of the deaf composer.

Cézanne said that until one has painted a grey, they are not a painter. We do not know what the blind Monet would think of this statement, but we do know that anyone who has ever stained their hands with paint knows that the sum of primary colours is never a pure black, contrary to what the theory of the chromatic circle maintains. No matter how good the quality of the paints, no matter how expensive the pigments, the result is usually a more or less dark brown, dirty, much like practice versus theory. Because the exercise of painting will always be dirty. The brown is that grey which will never be black, but contains everything visible, like our *Eigengrau*. The undifferentiated brown, that colour without light, that pragmatic grey of a dirty brush on a dirty palette, will never be a colour but rather the impossibility of an idea. The sum of the colours of these images that Aballí brings together and mixes to their midpoint, are part of the same brown covering all possibility of painting. That greyness that is not always visible, but

which tinges the whole of contemporaneity of a tired art. In an ultimate pictorial practice, the infinite mixture of all present, past and future painting would be a pasty mass of a saturated grey, probably *Art Gallery Grey*.

They say that the dust that accumulates around us is 70% made up of particles of our dead skin that separate from our tired bodies. Aballí's studio is left covered in dust because he assumes that this is the way the pieces can be seen: with both time and the grey imprinted. The dust measuring time by the particles of Ignasi's skin that cover his own work: strange body-art. How can we tolerate the image if no longer covered in the dust of the undifferentiated. It would be necessary to squint our eyes just like they recommend as the way to look at the paintings of the blind Monet. To squint until nothingness dissolves into grey nothingness, because nothingness is not the same as grey nothingness, because grey nothingness is already something. Perhaps the only possible way to confront the image is now without mediation. Images that enter and leave our body, with the tired perception of someone who has already seen all. Only from the undifferentiated mass of the disappointment of images it will be possible to switch them on again.

It is up to us now to walk through this exhibition, without a lens, here without the need to squint, with the filter of our *Eigengrau*, a shared colour code (#16161D), lightly covering the works with our own dust particles shed from our skin in contemplation. Nothing more innate than the grey of our own ash.

And if we listen to Cézanne, Ignasi Aballí is here more than ever a painter.

### **Marta Azparren, 2025**

[Text written on the deck of a ferryboat  
surrounded by blue as theory, grey mercury as practice].

# Ignasi Aballí

Born in Barcelona, Spain, in 1958, where he lives and works.

Ignasi Aballí's work is deeply rooted in conceptual art, exploring how perception and representation shape our understanding of everyday objects, language and media. His work often features minimalist approaches, questioning the nature of images, time and the concept of absence. Aballí engages with the notion of 'disappearance', using materials such as newspapers and subtle interventions to examine how information is consumed, lost or altered, exploring the relationship between images and texts. He invites viewers to reflect on the complexities of visual culture, memory and the passage of time. His work pushes the boundaries between what is seen and what is unseen, challenging us to reconsider the role of art in conveying meaning and perception. His approach to visual language is often critical, turning ordinary objects into profound reflections on contemporary life.

Graduated with a BA in Fine Art from the University of Barcelona. He has had several solo exhibitions, including at MACBA in Barcelona (2005), Fundação de Serralves in Porto (2006), IKON Gallery in Birmingham (2006), ZKM in Karlsruhe (2006), Pinacoteca do Estado de São Paulo, Brazil (2010), Museo Artium in Vitoria, Spain (2012), Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía, Madrid (2015), Fundación Joan Miró, Barcelona (2016), Museo de Arte de la Universidad Nacional de Colombia, Bogotá (2017), Galeria Kula (Split), and the Museum of Contemporary Art in Zagreb, Croatia (2018). He has had several gallery shows at Estrany-de la Mota in Barcelona, Elba Benítez in Madrid, and Meessen de Clercq in Brussels. He has also recently had gallery exhibitions at Proyecto Paralelo (Mexico City), Pedro Oliveira (Porto), and Nordenhake (Berlin). Aballí represented Spain in the 59th Venice Biennale in 2022. He has taken part in the 52nd Venice Biennale (2007), the 8th Sharjah Biennial (United Arab Emirates, 2007), the 11th Sidney Biennial (1998), the 4th Guangzhou Triennial (2012), and the 13th Cuenca Bienal (Ecuador, 2016). He was awarded the Joan Miró Prize in 2015.