

A 'Hanging House' for Spanish Abstracts

The Museum of Spanish Abstract Art in Cuenca
(from *The Herald Tribune*, Paris)

If the art of Spain is held in high esteem throughout the world, the Spanish seem to have always been the last to appreciate the fact. Since the time of Goya, most of the country's best art has been encouraged to flow quickly through the borders and into foreign collections.

Now, with the opening of the Museum of Spanish Abstract Art in this ancient city, a whole generation of painters and sculptors has achieved distinction as the sole attraction of a unique and permanent exhibition of international importance.

Not surprisingly, the museum is the work of artists. It contains the personal collection of Fernando Zóbel, a Philippine-born, Harvard-educated Spanish painter who began to buy the work of his fellow artists back in the 1950s. When his collection outgrew his apartment, Mr. Zóbel began to consider buying a house in some nearby tourist center and opening it to the public during the summer. Cuenca was the suggestion of painter Gustavo Torner, who knew that the city had begun the restoration of the famous cliff-edge "hanging houses" and had been looking for an attraction to go inside them.

No better frame could be found for these works than the classic quarter of this city, two square miles of winding streets and medieval façades that time has turned into a perpetual exhibition of abstract beauty. Hundreds of coats of paint have worn away, thick wooden doors have weathered and split, and walls cracked. In the course of exploring the streets east of the Plaza Mayor, one eventually finds the hanging houses. Here, in a narrow elbow of a street, is the battered wooden door of the new museum.

The first room, like all of the museum, is nearly barren. Sempere's Op Art screens form part of one of the walls and a painting by Luis Feito hangs on another. The windows have been curtained and the overhead beams covered to prevent distraction. The rest of the room serves as backdrop for a massive wooden sculpture by Eduardo Chillida.

The museum's extraordinary plan reaches its high point in the *sala negra*, or black room, where the walls, floor, and ceiling have been completely blacked out, and the only illumination is from overhead spot-lights. Each beam exactly frames a painting, heightening the intensity of the colors and lending an almost three-dimensional quality to some of the works.

The Study of Language

(from the introduction to the teachers' edition of a textbook)

The study of other languages has always had practical applications beyond the ability to communicate with others, and schools have traditionally used language study to accomplish much more than that.

In the Middle Ages, the Catholic Church established universities in which Latin was the language in which subjects were taught. Books were few and expensive, so it was more efficient to write them in the language that would reach the largest number of literate people. Nevertheless, Latin remained part of the curriculum long after the development of printing, the independent universities, and the rise of French as the international language. Indeed, *grammar school* originally meant "a place where Latin is taught."

Today, "living" languages have replaced "dead" ones in the curriculum, and the goal of international communication has been revived. This has in no way, however, diminished the value of a second language in understanding one's mother tongue. Every Spanish teacher knows that students who learn the word *cañon* will recognize its English cognate. And that those who have grasped the purpose of verb endings will realize that some inflections still exist in English, and will be more likely to use them correctly.

Few of your students will go on to careers that require them to speak Spanish. Many will never use the language again. But the study of Spanish will benefit them nevertheless because a better understanding of one's first language is still one of the best reasons for learning a second language.

¿Has escuchado el último 'best-seller'?

(from *El País*, newspaper in Madrid)

El libro parlante no es nada nuevo. Existe desde los años cuarenta, cuando el invento del elepé hizo posible discos de suficiente calidad y duración. Desde 1948 el grupo *Reading for the Blind* (libros para invidentes) ha grabado tomos para los estudiantes que no pueden leer. Tiene más de 76.500 títulos que presta gratis a los que necesitan ayuda.

El libro parlante llegó al público general poco después. En 1954, Caedmon Records introdujo una serie de grabaciones de conocidos autores. Consiguieron la participación de escritores tan importantes como T. S. Eliot y Dylan Thomas para leer sus propias poesías y cuentos.

El próximo paso importante fue la invención del casete. Enseguida los museos empezaron a ofrecer un nuevo servicio: conferencias portátiles sobre las obras. Desde aquel momento, las salas han estado llenas de personas silenciosas y respetuosas, que pasan de obra en obra en un vía crucis estético.

The Photo as Subject

The Paintings and Drawings of Chuck Close
(from *Arts Magazine*, New York)

In spite of his attempts to exclude emotional content, Close's paintings unavoidably retain (or acquire) a certain level. The sheer size of the heads suggests a kind of godlike superiority, an effect that is heighten-ed by shooting the photos from slightly lower angle than usual, in keeping with the visual relationship the viewer will have with the work in the gallery.

Close's gargantuan amplification and literal inter-pretation of photographic information force us to realize how little we have examined the world around us and the ways in which it is presented to us. The fact that so many people persist in seeing these paintings as highly factual representations of people rather than as representations of photos is proof of our complete assimilation of photographic syntax. It is easy to overlook the distortions in a family snap-shot or a newspaper photo, but it requires a lifetime of training to screen so much out of a nine-foot-high painting.

Close uses an 8-by-10-inch camera to take the photos he will work from. The lens that would most closely approximate the way that the human eye sees is the 160mm. But he uses a 190mm lens so that he can restrict the depth of field to only an inch or so at the plane of the eyes. The distortion caused by this longer lens is fairly mild, yet it alters a subject's appearance enough to give the head a narrow look—which may contribute to the strange sensation we get when looking at the portraits. More influential, however, is the fact that the subjects' eyes are focused on a distant camera lens, creating the disturbing sensation that he or she is looking *through* the viewer.



Prostate-Specific Antigen

(from The Hypertext Guide to Prostate Cancer website)

The prostate produces PSA for several beneficial purposes, not simply as a response to cancer.

Depending on your age, race, and other factors, a PSA of 4 ng/ml may not be particularly serious.

And, according to the NCCN, about 25 percent of men who have prostate cancer have a low PSA.

Numbers and Assays There is no single set of numbers for PSA—different assays give slightly different results and ranges. For Hybritech, the most commonly used assay, the “normal” range is 0-4, while the Yang range, for example, is 0-2.5. Find out what test you are given, and sure to use the same test every time you have your PSA checked. Changing assays makes it difficult to tell if your PSA is stable.

PSA and Age Because PSA rises with age (and BPH), a level that would be alarming in a twenty-year-old could be normal for a sixty-year-old.

PSA and Race PSA ranges differ by race. The normal, or safe, range for European-American men from 50 to 80 is 0 to 3.5 ng/ml. The range for African-American men is 0 to 2.0 ng/ml for men in their 40s, 4.0 in their 50s, 4.5 in their 60s, and 5.5 in their 70s. *New England Journal of Medicine*, 1996; 335:304-310

The Standard PSA Test The PSA blood test screens for complex-serum PSA (also called *bound PSA*), which includes not just PSA that might be produced in response to a cancer but also that which the prostate naturally produces and any that is the result of BPH. The value of routine PSA testing has been questioned, partly because of the number of false-positive results. Nevertheless, a community-based survey found PSA levels to be highly accurate in predicting cancers. *Journal of Urology*, 1995;151:1283-1290 .

The Free-PSA, or PSA II, Test This test was developed to compare the amount of complexed PSA with the amount of another form of PSA called free, or unbound, PSA. Oddly, a low percentage of free PSA in relation total PSA indicates cancer, and the lower it is, the more aggressive the tumor is likely to be. *Urology* 1997;49:379-384 The free-PSA test is usually given if the complexed-PSA level is between 4 and 10 but the digital-rectal exam shows nothing abnormal.

The principal benefit of the test is that it can eliminate many unnecessary biopsies. The Hybritech free PSA test is reported to have detected 95% of prostate cancers. And those that it missed were mostly small and not life-threatening. *Journal of the American Medical Association*, 279(19):1542-7 (May 20, 1998)

Although it would seem to make sense to use the free PSA test instead of the usual one, its results can be misleading. (For example, prostatitis causes a reduction in free PSA.) In the end, a steady rise in PSA is still a better indicator of cancer.