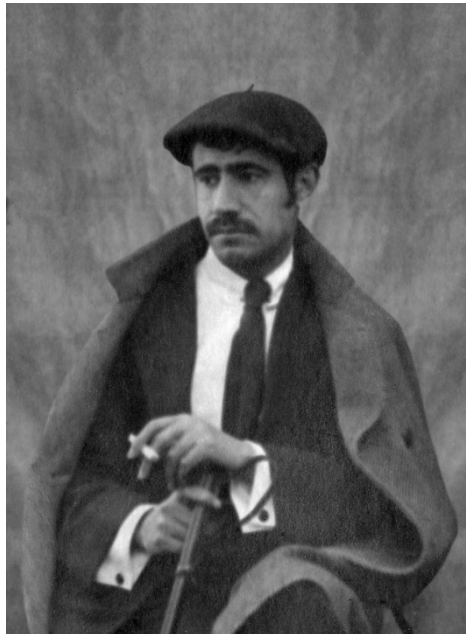


Data for a Biography

Miguel Bandrés Nivelá

Artist and engraver, the first compiler of Acín's work as a draftsman and writer in the press with his thesis on Ramón Acín's artistic work, Later published under the title "La obra artigráfica de Ramón Acín"



Ramón Acín, around 1926

Ramón Acín is, at this time, one of the most interesting and unusual figures from the artistic landscape of Huesca and Aragon from the first half of the 20th century. His exuberant literary and plastic work, his complex teaching activity, and his commitment to anarcho-syndical activism, which cost him several trials, imprisonment, exile, and a dramatic death, make it difficult to reconstruct and interpret him historically and critically. We find ourselves, without a doubt, before one of the most overlooked creators of modern art and bodies of work of his time.

Ramón Acín Aquilué was born in Huesca on August 30, 1888 to parents Santos Acín Mulier and María Aquilué Royán. His father worked as a surveyor in Huesca, where he married, and the family settled in the ancestral home popularly known as the *Casa de Ena*, located in the historic quarter on the Calle Cortes 3. Ramón was the youngest of three children, after siblings Santos and Enriqueta. He spent his childhood in Huesca, where he completed his first studies and high school, after which he moved to Zaragoza to study Chemical Science at the university, an effort he soon abandoned to return home, where he began his artistic activity as a self-taught painter. Always eager for new experiences, in 1910 he moved to Madrid to live the kind of bohemian life available in the Spanish capital at that time. Here his first cartoons would appear in the press,



drawn for the different humor-oriented weeklies, suggestively signed "Fray Acín" (Friar Acín).¹

At the beginning of 1912 he returned to Huesca, where he had the opportunity to publish his first cartoons and articles in *El Diario de Huesca*, a newspaper that had just undergone a thorough and modern transformation under Luis López Allué as editor-in-chief. Acín's drawings would reflect daily reality through the prism of a direct and simple humor featuring modernist strokes and devoid of any anecdotal ornamentation, while his articles would remind readers of his facet as a humorist, as he was as able with words as he was with his brush strokes.

In 1913 his young and restless spirit led him together with a small group of friends — including Ángel Samblancat and "Federico Urales" — to publish in Barcelona a weekly of anarchist leanings under the title *La Ira, Organo de expression del asco y la cólera del pueblo (Rage, An Organ of Expression of the Disgust and Anger of the people)*.² As is hardly surprising, given its name, the publication was not well received in governmental circles of the era, and its second issue would be its last, as its workshops were closed and its writers imprisoned.

Far from these vicissitudes, back in Huesca Ramón Acín created, in 1919, *Floreal*, a newspaper that, with a print run of 1,000 copies, would be published until the following year. From this short publication only part of an article signed by Acín with the title "Espigas Rojas" (Red Sprigs) has been preserved. It seems that this was the section in which he wrote, suggested by the fact that other texts of his were printed under this same title. He and his paper also collaborated with the Zaragoza weekly *El Comunista*.³

In addition to these publications all his own, Acín would continue to publish his drawings and articles in different papers in Huesca, Zaragoza, and in Barcelona, in *Solidaridad Obrera (Worker Solidarity)*, where his "Florecicas" (Little Flowers) were expected on a weekly basis.

With this background, he undertook a new and exciting adventure in the editorial world by publishing a series of humorous and critical drawings on bullfighting, entitled *Las corridas de toros en 1970. Estudios para una película cómica (Bullfights in 1970. Studies for a Comic Film.)*⁴ In addition to the capital importance of this book, and the fact that it was published in Huesca, we must also consider that a fervent campaign to build a new bullring was underway in Huesca at the time. As can be supposed, the publication of these drawings made Acín no friends among Huesca's publishers and bullfighting enthusiasts, so further publication of them was difficult. After these drawings were presented at the Salón de Fiestas del Mercantil de Zaragoza in 1921, they were not combined in a single volume until a Huesca publisher and friend of Acín, Vicente Campo, released the first edition of this controversial book in 1923.

But all this publishing work was not all that Ramón Acín had been up to in these years. His pictorial and sculptural work, although not as continuous over time, exhibited constant reinvention. We have already mentioned his beginnings as a self-taught sketch artist, but it is also true that the young Acín must have been attracted by the landscape painting and decorative sensibility of the painter Félix Lafuente (1865-1927), a fellow Aragonese who taught classes at the Provincial Museum of Huesca, which Acín attended for some time before his first trip to Madrid in 1910.

Three years later, he was awarded a scholarship by the Huesca Provincial Council to further his artistic studies. The type of aid provided by the Council consisted of a "travel grant," which the



scholarship holder could use for two years to produce one or two large paintings, almost always with a historical theme. Acín spent this time (1913-1915) travelling and living in Madrid, Toledo and Granada; it would be in this Andalusian city where he would paint a large-format oil painting depicting the Albaicín quarter: *Granada vista desde el Generalife (Granada Seen from the Generalife)*, which later would be displayed in the halls of the Provincial Council at the end of his period of sponsorship. Before his return to Huesca, he took the competitive examinations in Madrid to become a Drawing teacher, and in 1916 obtained a temporary teaching post at the Escuela Normal de Maestros y Maestras (teacher training school) in Huesca.

It was there, in the city of his birth, where he met Conchita Monrás Casas, whom he married in 1923. Conchita would be a constant and marked presence in all his work, and would actively support his initiatives and efforts throughout his life. The new family took up residence in Huesca, and settled in the house on the Calle Cortes 3, where Acín would open a private drawing academy that same year.

Without abandoning his pedagogical work, in 1926, after a trip to Paris, Acín began an intense period of artistic activity. His exposure to Europe's avant-garde and the Spanish artists in the French capital made a great impact on him and his work, as he would note a few months later in the pages of *El Diario de Huesca*:

"A few years ago we used to meet at the Café La Rotonda in Paris; among other comrades, Dr. Perico Aznar, Luis Buñuel, the filmmaker, and myself; the three Aragonese. We would arrive at the cafés from the museums, the laboratories, the studios, the art galleries ... every day we wrote down new knowledge and a new interest, and every day we had more faith in our convictions and our paths."⁵

Undoubtedly, his works were influenced by and reflected the first post-Cubist avant-garde movements. It is not surprising, then, that in December of 1929 Josep Dalmau, who had a very clear vision of a forward-looking orientation for his Galleries, made room for an exhibition of Acín's work in Barcelona. On this occasion he presented 40 works in line with a neo-Cubist conception, and a series of small sculptures cut out of sheet metal and cardboard. After the success of this exhibition at the new Galerías Dalmau on the Paseo de Gracia 62, he planned to take his works to Zaragoza, in May of the following year, to the recently inaugurated Rincón de Goya. He would then show a larger number of works, up to 70, including oils, pastels, small sculptures in sheet metal and bronze, and models of sculptural projects. The exhibition was well received in Aragonese circles, with glowing comments and several photographs of his work being published in the Zaragoza press, though there was also plenty of criticism and expressions of incomprehension towards the *new art* undertaken by Acín.

At the end of 1930 plans were being finalized for the plot against the dictatorship of Dámaso Berenguer. Acín was a prominent member of the CNT (National Workers' Confederation) in Huesca, and was in charge of organizing a workers' strike that was to take place in the capital city once the uprising had been proclaimed in Jaca. The rebellion floundered, and after several mishaps Acín managed to go into exile in Paris in January of 1931, where he would remain until the proclamation of the Republic.

On his return from his short escape to France, in June Acín attended the congress of the National



Workers' Confederation held in Madrid, and took the opportunity to exhibit at the Ateneo cultural center there. Together with his catalogue of works, he wrote a famous text, a true manifesto and synthesis of his vision of art:

"I am exhibiting some cheap metal sheets enhanced by simple folds ... and some lightly colored packing cartons, framed, as a friend said, with trunk rods. It's nothing much, but it's not the material, it's the spiritual aspect, as Unamuno would say..."

The most modern metal sheet or cardboard ages in two years. Two years, preceded by a quarter of a century of modest but continuous rebellions, in which one did nothing more than be alert to the Spanish moment.

Back from emigration in Paris, I've presented at El Ateneo - where better? - the work I did, awaiting the one I will do, I don't know how or when, because more than being an artist, in these highly human moments, it is important to be a grain of sand that adds to the sand storm that will sweep everything away.

I did not come to Madrid to exhibit. It was not worth the trouble and expense. As a delegate at the Congress of the National Confederation of Labor, I have been representing the Trade Unions of the Upper Aragon. With my delegate's credential, along with my pajamas and toothbrush, I have created these works of semi-bourgeois art ..."

In addition to the interest of the works presented in this exhibition, there was the personal aura that Acín acquired as a participant in the uprising in Jaca. Almost all the Madrid newspapers, and part of the provincial ones, published favorable reviews of this exhibition by Acín, and featured some of his works, highlighting his action in the events of Jaca and his subsequent exile with several of those who would be members of the new Government of the Republic.

Acín enjoyed a stroke of good luck in 1931, when he won a prize in Spain's Christmas Lottery and used part of the money to finance Luis Buñuel's documentary *Tierra sin pan (Land Without Bread)*. The filming lasted one month (April 20 -- May 24, 1932). Once finished, Acín prepared a new exhibition in Huesca, in the halls of the Círculo Oscense cultural center. Some of these works had already been displayed in previous exhibitions, although they contained a large number of cartoons linked to the Surrealism movement. This exhibition, reduced to a local framework, was preceded by his recent success in Madrid and caused real surprise and bewilderment among his fellow Huescans. It was not until September of 1935 that Acín would show his works again, and then he would do so at the Centro Obrero Aragonés (Aragonese Workers' Center) in Barcelona, in a group exhibition with 64 Aragonese artists.

Many of his artistic projects were cut short when, a year later, on the night of August 6, 1936, Ramón Acín was shot in front of the cemetery's walls in Huesca. In the same tragic month his companion Conchita met the same fate. □



¹ With a certain naivety, this name reminds us of some publications that appeared in the middle of the 19th century, in which Acín was very interested. They were satirical newspapers, as opposed to those devoted to politics or customs, and many of them featured a whole series of *Frays (Friars)*: "Fray Supino Claridades" (Madrid, 1885), "Fray Tinieblas" (Madrid, 1885)...

² This singular and concise motto appears below the title of this weekly.

³ In addition to this article, on the front page of this issue of *El Comunista* (April 3, 1920), there is a humorous drawing by Ramón Acín entitled "Limpias en invierno" (Clean in the Winter), which had just been presented at the Satirical Cartoonists' Exhibition held in Madrid.

⁴ Phrase accompanying the title of the book.

⁵ "Las víctimas de la ciencia" ("The Victims of Science"), *El Diario de Huesca* (January 19, 1930).

