INTRODUCTION

The nineteenth and twentieth centuries were witness to a great evolution in the world of art and the art market. The nineteenth century in particular was an age of permanent revolution: a time in which everything evolved and was in motion and new paths were constantly sought. Thus, the end of the century was a period of artistic experimentation in which new themes, new challenges and new ways of understanding artistic creation were explored. In short, a period with a passion for discovery.

By contrast, in the twentieth century, art history turned out to be a never-ending story: everything was discovered and rediscovered; the shortest paths sometimes come full circle, and artists wanted to conquer the world. It was an excited, but also exciting, century, which was full of contrasts: the best and the worst, the old and the new, the emergence of life and death. The period even saw changes in terms of capital city status as the world of art and the art market moved from Paris to New York in one swift and unfinished transition.

The exhibition From Paris to New York seeks to show, through the engravings and graphic work of the great artists of the time, the aforementioned evolution: the emergence and development of art, on the one hand, and the change in status of the great capitals of the world and the art market, on the other.
During the years of transition between the mid-nineteenth century and the early-twentieth century, Paris replaced Rome as an artistic centre. As a result, the art movement that emerged – Impressionism – drew a dividing line through the second half of the nineteenth century. Impressionists painted directly from nature and preferred scenes of everyday, contemporary life as opposed to classic themes of history and mythology.

Furthermore, the term Post-Impressionism describes the shift away from the first stage of Impressionism to the artistic avant-garde of the twentieth century, a mood that spread across Europe during the last two decades of the nineteenth century.

“The common theme running through the Gelonch Viladegut Collection is the permanence of engravings over time, through the ages, with their aesthetic variations and the incorporation of new techniques and languages”.
Antoni Gelonch

At the end of the nineteenth century – a period of political unrest and cultural transformation – many artists, in addition to Fortuny and Picasso, settled in Paris. Although at the time their importance was recognised, today they still remain to be re-acknowledged.

The arrival of artists from all over the world was an unprecedented phenomenon in the history of Paris and marked a period of cultural immigration, which was to redefine the path and artistic evolution of the avant-garde. The Catalans, mostly based in Montmartre, created a solid and supportive group that mutually helped one another and facilitated the arrival of newcomers.

“Making a collection represents, in my case, an aesthetic and intellectual construction that must bring about in myself, and in the people that may view it, moments of intimate satisfaction, introspection, encouragement and happiness. It is the point of convergence for a person and a passion at a certain moment in time”. Antoni Gelonch

The Universal Exhibition in 1900 opened the door to modernity and the French capital became a magnet for artists from all over the world.

During the first half of the twentieth century, engraving experienced very significant development. From Fauvism, Cubism and Expressionism to Surrealism and Abstract Art, numerous artistic movements gave engraving special importance in the creation and diffusion of expressive languages.

Picasso and Braque, Fernand Léger, Maurice Utrillo, Hans Arp and Max Ernst, among others, are just some of the names that stood out in the world of engraving.
“The thing that a collector normally enjoys the most is the quest: searching for and discovering a rare, extraordinary object or piece, with all the stories that it may withhold”.
Antoni Gelsonch

CATALAN ARTISTS IN SEARCH OF... (1950-1975):
THE ROLE OF THE CERCLE MAILLOL

The Cercle Maillo was a group of Catalan artists founded in 1946 at the heart of Barcelona’s Institut Français, which protected and supported them. In it, temporary exhibitions were organised and grants to study in Paris were offered to young artists from the French government. Antoni Tàpies, Albert Ràfols-Casamada, Joan Josep Tharrats and Josep Guinovarta, among others, benefited from these grants. The Cercle Maillo played a very important role in the diffusion of avant-garde art and in the education of young artists.

“As a collector, I would like to be a type of magician, wizard or metalsmith in order to convey my passion for engravings to my contemporaries”.
Antoni Gelsonch

THE AMERICAN ODYSSEY: NEW YORK, THE NEW CAPITAL OF ART
(1950-...)

During the twentieth century, a genuine visual revolution took place, which broke free from established norms. In the field of engraving, artists opted to use new stamping systems. Editions increased exponentially and specialised galleries began to open with more people taking an interest in viewing and purchasing serial artworks.

It is in this context that we can thus talk about the American odyssey; that is, the movements of the avant-garde, whose development, after the Second World War, involved the shifting of the art world’s centre – and also new visions with regard to the art market – from Paris to New York.

“Every passion borders on the chaotic, but the collector’s passion borders on the chaos of memories”.
Walter Benjamin