

JOSÉ FIOL

THE GREEN FOG

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Curatorial text. Raquel Victoria

The exhibition project “The Green Fog” is above all an open invitation. It invites the viewer to construct new narratives on the basis of the seven triptychs and the sound piece that comprise the show. It activates us, as passive observers and as co-creators of histories as well. This is why the exhibition, and the work of José Fiol itself, seek to connect themselves with us, visually and conceptually. Cut-up and editing techniques, inspired by experimental cinema and applied to painting, break with linearity, obliging us to leave aside the comfort of familiar narratives. Fiol activates a situation of ongoing tension between what is real and what is fictitious, between past and present, challenging viewers to question the authenticity of what is observed while coming up with meanings of their own.

Nowadays, society must deal with visual saturation, a result of the constant flow of imagery coming from advertising and social media. These images, designed for fast, ephemeral consumption, shape our perception of reality and restrict space for critical reflection. In these circumstances, the artist José Fiol proposes an alternative take, based on the image recycling. His practice consists of working with existing images, which in many cases have been forgotten or discarded, while taking on multiple meanings over time. These “third-hand” images are rescued and transformed to give them new life and revived purpose. The recycling of images does not only correspond to an aesthetic intention, but also to one of an ethical nature. Fiol sets himself in opposition to visual over-production and the “built-in obsolescence” of modern images, encouraging reflection on the cultural, historical and emotional values they represent. By reusing images from the past, his work seeks to highlight the importance of visual memory and its capacity to create newfound narratives.

For this show in Exhibition Hall D of Es Baluard Museu, Mallorcan artist José Fiol intertwines two apparently disconnected events through his paintings: the 1975 Wimbledon tennis final, and the cinematic reinterpretation of *Vertigo* (1958) in the experimental film *The Green Fog*, directed by Guy Maddin. Fiol wields these events as a starting point for his committed analysis and connection through cut-up technique, disarticulating and recomposing features in order to create new narratives and meanings. As we move through the exhibition, we are not only contemplating; we find ourselves in a space for query, where painting is transformed into an instrument of introspection and the production of new ideas. It is a call to creative action, favouring the reimagination of past and present as we conjointly build new realities, new narratives.

The 1975 Wimbledon final was one of the most iconic finals in the history of tennis, and not solely for the play on the court. It was equally distinguished by the context involving the players, Arthur Ashe and Jimmy Connors, two greats of the game, face to face in a battle charged with personal and cultural tensions. At the age of 31, Arthur Ashe was a veteran on the tennis circuit,

and was known especially for his elegance on the court and activism off of it. Ashe had acquired a leading profile in the struggle for civil rights. He was up against a young, energetic Jimmy Connors, who at 22 years old was coming off a spectacular 1974, having won the three Grand Slam tournaments he had played in (Australian Open, Wimbledon and the US Open).

The Arthur Ashe win at Wimbledon was historical for numerous reasons. First of all, Ashe became the first Afro-American player to win the most prestigious tournament in tennis, an achievement that had a powerful social impact at a time when racial tension was still very real in the United States and other parts of the world. Ever aware of his pioneering role, Ashe attributed the win to his skill on the court and his struggle for equality. Another factor that made the final especially intriguing was the difference in style and age between the players, heightened by their strained personal relationship. In 1974, Ashe and other tennis players in the ATP filed a lawsuit against Connors for 10 million dollars. Connors had chosen not to join the ATP, opting instead to sign an exclusive contract with the promoter Bill Riordan, a source of conflict with the association that represented the vast majority of professional players. As the president of the ATP at the time, Ashe played a key role in this legal dispute, raising the tension between them.

The 1975 Wimbledon final was both a tactical and a psychological duel. Ashe was aware that Connors was an incredibly aggressive player, with imposing baseline play and an impetuous character, so he decided that the only way to defeat him would be with a carefully calculated strategy. He chose to slow down the pace of play; it was as if on each rally, with each stroke, he was able to cut and paste the ball onto Connors's court, avoiding any confrontation on his rival's terms. All of these strategies employed by Ashe ended up distracting Connors, who after the match would state: "I could not get that fog out of my head."

That same fog, along with the technical strategy using cut-up and the editing, are present in the film *The Green Fog* (2017), giving it an intriguing, fragmentary ambience that redefines the original narrative. This experimental film project from 2017 was directed by Guy Maddin, in collaboration with Evan Johnson and Galen Johnson. It is conceived as an homage and reimagining of the Alfred Hitchcock classic *Vertigo* (1958); yet instead of recreating it directly, *The Green Fog* has its own unique editing technique.

The Green Fog does not contain any footage shot specifically for the film. Instead, it is made up entirely of film clips, TV programmes and other filmed material shot in San Francisco, the city where *Vertigo* takes place. Director Guy Maddin, who is known for his surrealist avant-garde style, uses these film fragments deftly to reconstruct and reinterpret the plot of the original *Vertigo*. In this case, however, the story is not told in linear fashion, nor in a conventional manner. Maddin plays with the narrative structure and the editing, creating an abstract, meditative visual experience. His film is an exercise in the art of remixing, where scenes are spliced together to conjure emotions, atmospheres and subject matters that are similar to those found in *Vertigo*, although without relying upon a clear narrative. The result is a kind of cinematographic collage that explores the relationship between memory, cinema and place.

Exhibition Hall D of the museum is transformed into a canvas, where Fiol mixes these two cases into a veritable cocktail, a pictorial, figurative and conceptual collage. In his curatorial process, Fiol recreates the iconic 1975 Wimbledon final by means of triptychs representing the two players, divided by a film still from the movie *The Green Fog*. The layout of the pieces takes its cue from the progressive advancement of the tournament itself: from the quarter finals, to the semis, then ultimately getting to the central wall, which is the culminating point of the exhibition's narrative, featuring the legendary final between Jimmy Connors and Arthur Ashe.

Quite apart from this choice in the presentation of the pieces, it could be said that the connection between the 1975 Wimbledon final and *The Green Fog* is neither direct nor evident at first sight. However, certain relationships can be derived on a thematic and stylistic level, especially in terms of how both works are related to the idea of memory, interpretation and archival use. If we were to do an indexation of these connections, it would highlight the need to create a comparative list where the coincidences between them might be elucidated.

It would begin by emphasising contextual subject matter, such as periods and memories. Both works, although created using different media and with contrasting contexts, share an intention to revisit the past so as to dismantle it, only to then reconstruct it in a new light. The 1975 Wimbledon final and *The Green Fog* challenge the public to consider how memory and narrative might be manipulated, whether by means of sporting strategy or film editing, giving rise to a new understanding of what might have previously seemed clear, thus surprising and intriguing us.

Another key encounter in this new dialogue presented by Fiol is the relationship between reinterpretation and psychology found in both events. During the final, Ashe defeated Connors by using an unexpected strategy, based on variations of pace and tactical shifts, instead of relying on physical prowess, which was the most habitual approach. This way of “reinterpreting” the game, using a strategic line of action instead of brute force, resonates with the emphasis in *The Green Fog*, which reinterprets a familiar plot (that of *Vertigo*) through collage and the recombination of visual shards.

Further to this, the film remakes a story that is already known, yet doing so through an entirely different method: instead of recreating it or filming it anew, it uses archival images to create something quite novel, distorting and recontextualising what the viewer is already familiar with. Besides, by exploring the plot of the film more attentively, we see how *Vertigo* uses untruth as a manipulative strategy. If we recall the character of Elster, he uses Scottie’s debilitating fear of heights to “justify” the murder of his wife.

These characteristics lead to others, such as nostalgia and the use of archival material, as part of the working thematic of this project. As in previous efforts, José Fiol immerses himself in a feeling of archivistic nostalgia, presenting us with two new main characters. The final is part of sport nostalgia, as a match which is recalled not solely for the result, but also for what is meant at the time and still symbolises. This kind of event tends to be revised and revived by the media, just as *The Green Fog* revisits and reviews a set of images from the past. The film explores how the past is perceived by means of fragments and imagery. It might be stated that it is a film that builds over the foundation of collective memories of cinema, just as Ashe built his victory at Wimbledon over the foundation of his knowledge and experience as a tennis player.

If we focus now on technical traits, such as colouring, we find something that comes to the fore in both cases: green tones. This is crucial in tennis, as it is something we find on grass courts such as Wimbledon, a traditional fast surface. It is also found on artificial surfaces, as a way of intensifying the contrast with electric yellow tennis balls, making them more visible. It is also a tone we encounter in *The Green Fog*, but also in the 1958 film, where green is a colour that takes on major significance in the underlying plot of *Vertigo*. In his essay *Vértigo y pasión. Un ensayo sobre la película ‘Vertigo’ de Alfred Hitchcock* [Vertigo and Passion: An Essay on Alfred Hitchcock’s ‘Vertigo’],² Eugenio Trías elaborates on the relationship between the Judy character and the colour green:

Emerald green lights which go perfectly with the loud tones associated with the young woman. Judy wears a green suit the first time she meets with Scottie. Those neon lights, in a magical moment of the movie, give an aura of ionised electricity to Scottie’s hair and forehead; they infuse his gaze, driven by desire. This takes place at the critical moment when the supreme scene of the transformation ritual takes place, when Judy is radically metamorphosed into Madeleine, fulfilling her resurrection “amongst the dead”, announced by a surreal green halo. Green is, in effect, the appropriate colour for all kinds of metamorphosis. It is the colour of memory (the past) and of hope (its revival and resurrection).¹

¹ Eugenio Trías, *Vértigo y pasión. Un ensayo sobre la película ‘Vertigo’ de Alfred Hitchcock*. Barcelona: Galaxia Gutenberg, 2007.

Both in sport and in cinema, green emerges as a tone charged with significance, underscoring the connection between visual aesthetic and emotional narrative.

These 21 new paintings by José Fiol absorb the previously mentioned connections and open up the possibility for viewers to create further connections themselves. We find relationships with both events in the conceptualization of the image, as well as in the methodological and technical processes of the artist.

When it comes to how images are treated, Fiol uses the same cut-up technique as Maddin in his visual work, setting up a dialogue between film and painting. Inspired by *The Green Fog*, Fiol employs the resignification of images to construct new narratives, able to defy established conventions. Just as Maddin deconstructs *Vertigo* on the path to a renewed vision of the film, Fiol decomposes historical events, like the 1975 Wimbledon final, and recontextualises them along with aspects of the cinematic collage wielded by Maddin.

This method of recomposing becomes the conceptual groundwork on which José Fiol develops his own artistic project. Just as in the film *The Green Fog*, where the disarticulated images give rise to new associations and meanings, in the work of Fiol historical images are transformed into catalysers for reflection on how history might be reconstructed and resignified through art. Fiol takes this practice even further in one of the project's key pieces, entitled *Quiet Please* (2025). When moving in front of the panel of triptychs dedicated to the Wimbledon final, the viewer is surrounded by an immaterial companion: the sound. Complementing his visual production, Fiol includes a sound creation that functions as independent works. This soundscape is conceived as a symbolic match between the two main agents in the exhibition—the Wimbledon final and the Maddin film—where the voices of both strive to come to the surface, whispering, setting up a dialogue between them.

We also find connections with the methodology and work of José Fiol in his exploration of falsehood as a central concept. In *The Green Fog* and in certain distraction techniques in tennis, falsehood and trickery through fiction play a crucial role. Fiol brings this notion into his work by including aspects that, while seeming to be authentic, in reality are fictitious fabrications. Falsehood becomes an instrument of creation, a means by which to destabilise viewers' perception and lead them to question the veracity of what is being observed. Just as the tennis player might distract his opponent using a false manoeuvre, Fiol deflects attention from "truth" to explore the wealth of many possible interpretations. The relationship between fiction and reality is the key factor in Fiol's work. In these paintings, the clothing of the characters depicted does not necessarily correspond to what they were really wearing at a given time, but rather to a re-creation that inserts a layer of fiction into a historical narrative. In this case, therefore, the falsehood concerning clothing is transformed, then is cut out and attached to another surface, namely the white cube. This feature evolves to become part of Fiol's work, rendering homage to the traditional dress-code at Wimbledon. Intervening in clothing underscores the power of art to reinterpret history, suggesting that truth might be as malleable as the fabric of the painting's canvas.

Another aspect worthy of note, related to Fiol's methodological processes, would be his way of appropriating memory. The 1975 Wimbledon final stands out as a symbol of sporting nostalgia, an event that will endure in our memory. This is not just because of the result, but due to its profound meaning in that given historical context, and for its present-day relevance. This kind of event, reviewed and evoked constantly in the media, find its parallel in the way that Guy Maddin's *The Green Fog* explores the perception of the past through visual fragments and recollections. Just as Ashe put his victory together at Wimbledon on the basis of accumulated experience and deep understanding of the game of tennis itself, *The Green Fog* constructs a cinematographic narrative starting with the collective memory of film itself, reworking images from the past to created new meanings. Similarly, Fiol employs these historical and cinematographic references to recontextualise and re-signify past event in his work, inviting the viewer to reflect on how memory is constructed and perceived both in art and in life. This practice is by no means novel in the work of Fiol, as part of the very definition of his work is this use of nostalgia and the archive.

This can be seen in previous projects, such as “Heart-Shaped Box” (2019) and “MacGuffin” (2022).

With these various keys, connections and reflections on the imagination, production and methodology of José Fiol, we invite the viewer to undergo an active exercise of interpretation. The work, like a game where the pieces are ever shifting, no longer depends on the creator’s vision, but rather on direct interaction with the public. It is your turn to move. This is, ultimately, an invitation to critical thought and to reconfiguration. As we mentioned at the beginning of this text, the project does not seek to offer definitive answers, but rather to create an exploratory space where everyone might be able to redraft meaning from their own personal experience. Just as with any invitation, what is presented here is simply a starting point. The clues, gestures and visual and conceptual connections are the seeds of a reflection, which grows with each gaze that is directed towards the work. This is not a one-directional act, but an encounter where the viewer, with his or her own background and perspective, has the power to transform and enrich what is being presented.

This project thus becomes a collaborative exercise, an open conversation between art and the public. The viewer’s reinterpretation is essential for the work to acquire new life, for it to unfold in various directions and continue to grow beyond the constraints of the physical space. The work is not just what is hung on the walls or arranged in the gallery, but is what happens when the viewer is involved, becoming an active part of its existence.

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