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FOREWORD

It is once again an honor for the University of Chicago to link the life and writings of Vicente Huidobro with Chicago, almost a decade since his work was the subject of an international symposium at the University in 1978.

The present exhibition, composed of documentation from Huidobro's personal archives, presents his work and artistic credo to a wider audience. The manuscripts, books, and photographs assembled here document a complex literary career touching three continents; they also recall a time during our century when the literary scene had an unmistakable character and vitality. The documents are inevitably meager when compared to the man himself; in the present exhibition they serve as clues for viewers to consider before going on to read Huidobro for themselves.

This exhibition arrives at the University of Chicago Library after being shown in Valencia and Madrid. Its content comes from various

sources, most notably members of the Huidobro family to whom we express our gratitude and appreciation. The exhibition would not have been possible without the support of the Consellería de Cultura de la Generalitat Valenciana, the Centro de las Letras Españolas, Ministerio de Cultura, and the University of Chicago. The present exhibition has also been the beneficiary of considerable preparatory work done in Spain and has been skillfully adapted to the Library's facilities by John C. Baum, the University Library's Exhibition Coordinator. It was Professor René de Costa who originated the idea for this exhibition both here and in Spain; he chose the items in the exhibition from a great mass of documentation and prepared the accompanying narrative text. We are grateful to him for helping to bring Vicente Huidobro to Chicago.

ROBERT ROSENTHAL,
Department of Special Collections



There are many facets to Huidobro: novelist, poet, playwright, political activist, polemicist, screenwriter. . . . He seems to have tried his hand at practically everything—and always in avant-garde. For Octavio Paz, Huidobro is “the oxygen of our poetry,” the air in which Spanish-language writers live and breathe.

Huidobro's early formation was in Santiago de Chile, at the tail end of turn-of-the-century aesthetics. Assimilating the refined subtleties of the system, he rebels, publishing his first calligrams in 1913, several years before Apollinaire. In 1916, still in his early twenties, and with the war in Europe raging, he embarks for France with his wife and children, in search of a new horizon. There are stunning successes in Paris and Madrid: founding a Cubist literary review with Pierre Reverdy and Max Jacob; finding new friends in Gris, Picasso, and Lipchitz; stimulating the birth of Ultraism in Spain. . . . Huidobro was endowed with an extraordinary creative drive, and an equally extraordinary ability to anticipate the new, to be always in the front line.

The only constant element in Huidobro's complex life and works is not his much touted “Creationism” — at best a banner of the 1920s — but rather change and the ferocity with which he defended the integrality of his thinking as it evolved. He was a tireless theorist, one who not only enjoyed explaining his point of view, but who wanted to persuade everyone to think just like himself. Yet the goals and purposes of his thinking changed so often that not even the most ardent disciple could keep the faith. One of his friends, Spanish poet Salvador Quintero, said that he was an invitation to an endless quest: “**It is impossible to be at**

ease with Huidobro, even to stand alongside him, for once you blink your eyes, he is beyond you, already moving on to something else, until he vanishes in a new horizon.”

In this exhibition, made possible by the generous support of the Consellería de Cultura de la Generalitat Valenciana, of the Spanish Ministry of Culture, of The University of Chicago, and by the graciousness of the poet's son, don Vicente García Huidobro Portales, who has permitted me to select material from the archives he preserves, I have tried to provide an approach to the many horizons pursued by Huidobro: from his earliest beginnings in Chile, to his last years in France during the Second World War. The exhibition documents Huidobro's incorporation into the Parisian avant-garde, his directive role in Spanish Ultraism, his political campaigns for the presidency in Chile and for democracy in Spain, as well as his friendship and collaboration with the intellectual and artistic stars of his time: Picasso, Gris, Miró, Arp, Apollinaire, Reverdy, Le Corbusier, Satie, Varèse, Tzara, Marinetti, Robert and Sonja Delaunay, Douglas Fairbanks, Gloria Swanson, Charlie Chaplin. . . .

He was in New York in 1927; and in Chicago in 1978, thirty years after his death, he was the subject of an international symposium. He returns to this city and this university in 1988, when the avant-garde has taken its place in history and we can now appreciate its many facets in the persona of one of its major figures.

RENÉ DE COSTA,
Department of Romance Language and Literature

Huidobro In Avant-Garde

An Exhibition in the Department of Special Collections, The Joseph Regenstein Library, The University of Chicago, Winter 1988

Curator: René de Costa • Design and installation: John C. Baum, Joaquín Lara

Photography and tinting: Rafael de Luis • Catalogue: René de Costa, John C. Baum

Sponsors: Consellería de Cultura de la Generalitat Valenciana • Centro de las Letras Españolas, Ministerio de Cultura
The University of Chicago

Lenders: Vicente García Huidobro Portales, Vladimir Huidobro, César Soto Gómez, Carlos Alberto Cruz, Juan Manuel Bonet,
Josefina R. Sanjurjo, René de Costa, The University of Chicago Library

Itinerary: *Valencia*: June 1987, Palau de la Música i Congressos
Madrid: October 1987, Biblioteca Nacional

THE MAKING OF A POET: CHILE (1893-1916)

Born into a patrician family in Santiago de Chile in 1893, Vicente García Huidobro Fernández, heir to the title *Marqués de Casa Real*, used his position of privilege to foment changes in art, literature, cinema, politics and the social order:

“This young artist is a real character. When others of his age, with his social position and his millions, give themselves over to the sterility of a life of bland leisure, he writes books that are like a revolt against his birthright.”

Huidobro began his studies, along with others of his social class, in the *Colegio de San Ignacio*, the most exclusive school of the time:

“Vicente was educated by the Jesuits. He abandoned his studies to marry quite young, while still a boy. They lived in his parent’s palace, the former residence of the *Marqués de la Pica*, a sumptuous mansion on the Alameda. Its vast and imposing hall was the scene of one of the most spectacular balls of the time, regally presided over by Vicente’s mother, who also lived in that enormous palace which, in its various wings, housed several generations of the family, all sorts of servants—among them a very celebrated midget and domestic fool—all in all some seventy souls . . .”



The Huidobro family residence, where the poet was born on 5 January 1893



Huidobro at 17, when the young “bohemians” invited to his house “sipped tea and devoured biscuits”

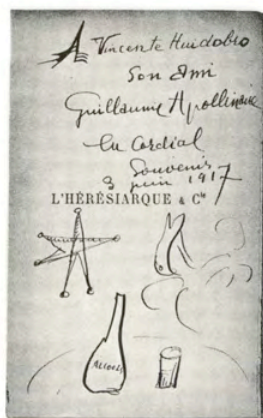
THE PARIS OF CUBISM (1917)

Huidobro, on arriving in Paris in December of 1916 with his wife, children, and a house-servant, knew scarcely any French. Nonetheless, his incorporation into the avant-garde was easy and immediate. A passenger on the ship informed him of the location of a bookstore where the Cubists gathered for readings and exhibitions. At one of these readings, just a few days after his arrival, he met two Spanish-speakers (Gris and Picasso) who welcomed him to the group and introduced him to Apollinaire and Reverdy. Apollinaire even helped him to find an apartment. Then Reverdy, and later Gris, lent a hand in translating his *Espejo de agua* poems from Spanish into French:

“When I arrived in Paris I came to know various groups. Some young poets, trying to escape from Symbolism, had fallen into something much worse: Futurism. These people were publishing *SIC*, whose director was Pierre Albert-Birot, and among whose collaborators were Pierre Reverdy, Jean Cocteau and, occasionally, Apollinaire. After long conversations and a continuous exchange of ideas with Pierre Reverdy, the most interesting of these younger poets, I founded with him the review *Nord-Sud*, in March of 1917. In this review a new tendency took shape, the most serious and profound development since Symbolism.”



Portrait of Huidobro by Gris (1917)



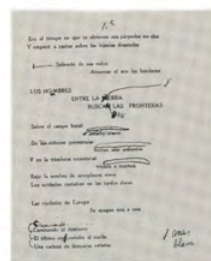
Book of Apollinaire, dedicated to Huidobro (1917)

THE MADRID OF “ULTRA” (1918)

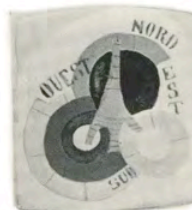
In the Spring of 1918, Huidobro, Lipchitz, and Gris left Paris to get away from the noise of the war and took up residence in Beaulieu-près-Loches, a small town near Tours. There Huidobro wrote *Poemas árticos*, his first book of avant-garde poetry in Spanish, dedicating it to Gris and Lipchitz: “In remembrance of our late-night chats.” Anxious to see the book in print, Huidobro moved on to Madrid, where in July he rented an apartment in the Plaza de Oriente, facing the Spanish Royal Palace.

In Madrid he came into contact with the Delaunays, Cansinos-Asséns, and Gómez de la Serna (who presided over a bohemian “tertulia” in the Café Pombo). A score of younger writers receptive to his ideas regarding what was then called “new poetry” gathered around him and eventually launched “Ultraism,” a Spanish variant of Dada.

Huidobro, seeking to retain his leadership position, spoke then of *Creación*, a multi-language review of the arts, around which he intended to consolidate his own variant of Cubism, called “Creationism.” The review would take several years to move beyond the project stage, for Huidobro in 1919 was obliged to make a return visit to Chile for family reasons. Before leaving Spain however, he saw into print four volumes of poetry: two with the Imprenta Pueyo (*Ecuatorial* and *Poemas árticos*), then one of the most important publishing houses and that for which Gris had designed some covers. With another publishing house (Jesús López), he brought out *Tour Eiffel* and *Hallali* (in French) as well as a second edition of *El espejo de agua*.



A page-proof of *Ecuatorial* (1918), corrected by Huidobro

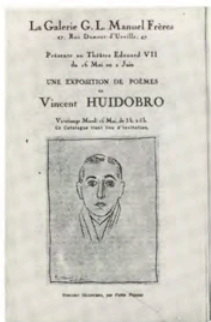


Cover design by Robert Delaunay for Huidobro’s *Tour Eiffel* (1918)

THE APEX OF THE AVANT-GARDE: PARIS (1920-1925)

On returning to Paris in 1920, Dadaism is on the rise and Huidobro takes up a defensive position along with Le Corbusier in the pages of *LEsprit Nouveau*. At the same time he launches his own campaign for Creationism, publishing the first issue of *Creción/Création*, and *Saisons choisies*, a sampler of his poetry with a preliminary essay setting forth his aesthetic principles, "La Création Pure." The campaign signals the beginning as well as the end of his ambition to unite the vanguard around the idea of Creationism. So much so, that in 1925, when he publishes *Manifestes*, a collection of his theoretical writing, "La Création Pure" is significantly absent.

Yet, after putting Creationism behind him, Huidobro became even more active. Between 1922 and 1925, there is an exhibit of his "painted-poems" in the Théâtre Edouard VII; he collaborates with Sonja Delaunay on high-fashion designs with poems to be worn; Varèse adapts his *Tour Eiffel* to music; and he works on a "Cubist film" with Rumanian director Mime Mizu. He also gets involved in politics, first campaigning against the British Empire in favor of Irish independence, and later against the oligarchy in his own country, Chile, to which he suddenly returns in 1925, but not before fulminating against Surrealism in a lecture at the Sorbonne, and parodying the "automatic writing" of Breton in his *Tout à coup* and *Au-Revoir* (1925).



Catalog of an exhibition of "painted-poems" (1922), with a portrait of Huidobro by Picasso



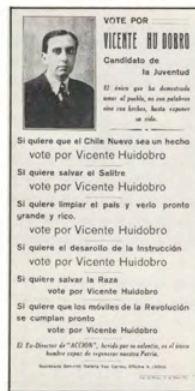
Minuit, "painted-poem" of a starry night (1922)

POLITICAL ADVENTURE IN CHILE (1925)

In March of 1925, Huidobro abruptly shuts down his Paris house, and hurriedly begins the long voyage back to Chile with his entire family. In Santiago, a military coup had ousted Arturo Alessandri, a populist parliamentary President. Big changes were rumored, and Huidobro viewed this as an opportunity to be the man of the hour, young enough and with sufficient prestige to rally the "young Turks" of his country in a mission of patriotic reform.

In the literary field, his return was triumphant and the incipient Chilean avant-garde headed by Pablo Neruda and Pablo de Rokha welcomed him with open arms. He was notably less successful in the field of politics, and on the sentimental front he was to face an unanticipated battle. His campaign for the presidency was a scandalous affair. Even more scandalous was the prim standards of Chilean high society in the 1920s was his private life: he fell madly in love with Ximena Amunátegui, a fifteen-year-old high-school girl—beautiful and mature for her years, and daughter of a powerful political figure, don Domingo Amunátegui.

With his life threatened, he found himself obliged to leave his young lover, his wife, children, and his country, going off to exile, first in Paris and later in New York, where he was attracted by the lure of the cinema.



Presidential campaign flyer (1925)



Ximena Amunátegui, at 15: "Vicente, my love, I'll go to eternity with you"

THE LURE OF THE CINEMA: NEW YORK (1927)

New York in 1927 was still the capital of American movies and was at a peak of cultural splendor and economic power. A Parisian friend, Edgar Varèse, who had put Huidobro's *Tour Eiffel* to music for a New York performance, was then residing in the city. Being well-connected with people in the performing arts, he put the poet in contact with Douglas Fairbanks and Charlie Chaplin. This connection prompted Huidobro to breathe new life into his aborted "Cubist movie" on the theme of *Cagliostro*, winning him a \$10,000 prize for the script and the promise of a future production. Huidobro at this time began to write on the movies and in the commercial press, contributing articles to publications such as *Vanity Fair*. Admiring Charles Lindbergh's feat, he even wrote an epic canto in English celebrating his transatlantic flight.

Although buoyed up by these successes, and fêted as a "Latin lover" by the movie starlets, he could not, or did not wish to root himself in New York as he had in France. One day, without announcing anything to anyone, he shut down his apartment at 859 Seventh Avenue and took a boat to Chile, to carry off Ximena, the young woman he could not forget. A few months later they would be together in Paris.



Clipping from the Brooklyn Citizen (24 July 1927)



With Lya de Putti and other starlets in New York (1927)

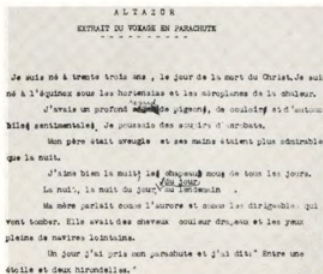
ALTAZOR: MADRID (1931)

This is the year of *Altazor*, a long poem in seven cantos, considered to be Huidobro's major work. The poet himself attributes to it "an historic importance," because it registers "all the trails I have blazed."

The earliest reference to the project dates from 1919, when Huidobro stops over in Madrid to greet Cansinos-Asséns, who, reporting on this in the press, mentions that Huidobro is carrying with him a new (unpublished) book, *Voyage en parachute*. Judging by the title, the project was originally in French. And it is in French that the earliest fragments of the poem are released: in 1925, a portion of what was then called *Altazor*, *voyage en parachute* was translated into Spanish by Juan Emar; in 1930, rebaptized as *Altazor*, a section of Canto IV appeared in *Transition*.

In January of 1931, with the poem in its final form — now in Spanish — Huidobro travels to Madrid in search of a publisher. Rushed into print, it is in all the bookstores a few months later.

While in Madrid (January-February), Huidobro is a controversial figure: lionized by his old friends from Ultraism, and barely tolerated by the new generation whose champion is Federico García Lorca. At a literary banquet in Madrid, in February of 1931, Lorca reads aloud a cryptic poem, praising and denigrating Huidobro in the same breath. A new battle line is drawn.



The beginning of *Altazor* in its original French version



Portrait of Huidobro by Joaquín Torres García (1931)

POLITICAL MILITANCY (1930s)

During the 1930s Huidobro does not participate directly in the Parisian avant-garde. His name is utilized nonetheless in the promotion of several post-surrealist spin-offs: the "Orphism" of Eugène Jolas; the "Dimensionism" of Charles Sirato; the "Constructivism" of Jean Héliou and Joaquín Torres García. Each of these tendencies sees something in the later work of Huidobro analogous to their spirit.

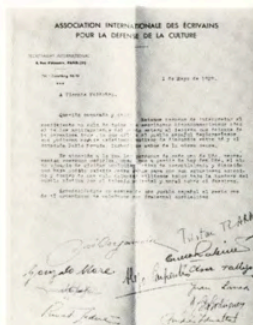
With the insurrection of Franco in July 1936, Huidobro proceeds to organize the intellectuals of his country in support of the Spanish Republic, and in 1937 he goes off to Spain himself: first with the Army of General Lister in the defense of Aragón; later, in the Congress of Writers and Intellectuals in Valencia.

During the crucial years of the Spanish Civil War and the Popular Front government in Chile, Huidobro and Neruda occupy rival positions within the Left: Huidobro as a militant Communist; Neruda as an antifascist. So tense and contradictory was the situation in 1937 that Tristan Tzara and other committed writers decided to intervene in the name of the International Association of Writers in Defense of Culture, sending letters to Neruda and Huidobro (then in Valencia) asking them to put a stop to their dispute "for the good of the common cause."

Their truce was short-lived, for back in Chile in 1938, a new battle broke out, this one led by their younger admirers.



With Picasso and Miró at the 1937 Congress in support of the Republic



A collective letter sent to Huidobro in Valencia asking him to put an end to the dispute with Neruda, signed by Tzara, Carpentier, Vallejo, Larrea, Bergamín, et al.

FINALE (1948)

Ever eager to be in the thick of things, Huidobro, having renounced the Communist Party, obtains permission to enter France as a war correspondent. In this capacity, he was with the Americans in France and Germany. Wounded twice, in April and again in May 1945, he was sent to London before being discharged.

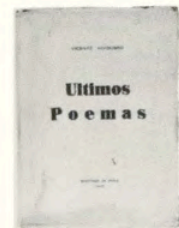
One offshoot of the war is the awakening in him of an Americanist sentiment, a hope that the New World would act as the cultural and democratic savior for a war-ravaged Europe. At this point in his career he turns his back on the politics and polemics of primacy to maintain that artistic creation is the product of an entire culture and does not reside in nations or individuals.

When he finally returns to Chile, at the war's end, it is to seek refuge — distancing himself from the literary world and from politics — at a family ranch bordering the Pacific, with his new love, Raquel Señoret, a young Chilean he had met at his country's embassy in London.

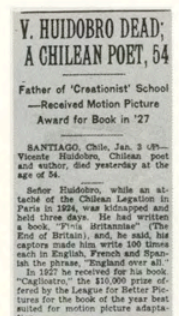
On Christmas of 1947, at his seaside retreat in Cartagena, Huidobro suffers a brain hemorrhage which inexorably leads to his death on January 2nd 1948. The family arranged for him to be buried on a hill overlooking the Pacific ocean. The sepulchral inscription echoes *Altazor*:

**Aquí yace el poeta Vicente Huidobro
Abrid la tumba
Al fondo de esta tumba se ve el mar...**

(Here lies the poet Vicente Huidobro/ Lift the tombstone/ Beneath it you can see the sea...)



Posthumous collection of Huidobro's "last poems," prepared by his daughter, Manuela García Huidobro Portales Bello



Obituary in the Herald Tribune (Paris, 4 January 1948)

In June 1944, in the midst of the Second World War,
Huidobro writes to a friend regarding the role of poetry in the world of tomorrow:

“WE MUST FILL THE
WORLD WITH POETRY, INFIL-
TRATE POETRY EVERYWHERE, PAVE
THE EARTH WITH POETRY; SO THAT
WHEN THEY LOOK AT THIS PLANET FROM
MARS, THEY WILL SEE RIVERS AND
ROADS OF POETRY CRISSCROSSING
THE ENTIRE GLOBE”
