Also known as “the Formentera painter” for the fame his works brought the island. The Blanes (Girona) Town Council will render homage to Bataller at the vernissage for an exhibition of his painted work.

Last Monday, 11 November, artist and painter Rafael Bataller i Giralt died in Blanes at the age of 92. Born in Blanes on 26 November, he was the youngest son of Dolors Giralt and Dr. Tomàs Bataller, himself an amateur photographer in addition to his normal work. Rafael Bataller's first drawing studies were done with water-colour painter Ramon Reig in Figueres, and during the Civil War he studied with painter Àngel Planells at the Escola d'Arts i Oficis de Blanes.

Tomorrow, Wednesday, 11 November at 10:30 am, a memorial service is scheduled in the parish of Santa Maria de Blanes. Later that same day, his ashes will be scattered, to remain a part of the sea that he had always loved and turned to for inspiration.

An aficionado of sailing, Bataller was among the founding members of the Blanes Sailing Club, established in 1943. In 1950 he received a degree from the Escola de Belles Arts Sant Jordi de Barcelona before continuing his studies in print-making with master Jaume Pla. The artist studied with Pla until in 1956 (and again in 1958) the painter was awarded a grant to travel to Paris together with Josep Roca-Astre and Jordi Curós.

The four paradises of Rafael Bataller

In the summer of 1958 the painter received his first recognition for the success of his work in Paris, from the city of Blanes. At this time writer Josep Maria de Sagarra would also dedicate a poem to Bataller, titling it Rafael Bataller, pintor i navegant (Rafael Bataller, painter and sailor). It was also at this point that friends baptised Bataller es fenomenu (the phenomenon) in allusion to the artist's capacity for excelling at anything he undertook. In 1968 he married Filipina artist Rosario de Oteiza, and together they set out in search of beauty and inspiration in Blanes, Formentera, París and La Vall d'Aran.

Over the course of decades, Bataller built a respected name for himself as a painter and received abundant praise for his work. On one such instance the Blanes Town Council named him keynote speaker of the Festa Major de Santa Anna (1997) and, more recently, he was awarded the Premi Sant Jaume by the Formentera Island Council (2011) and invited as guest of honour at the Conselh Generau d'Aran (April 2013).

The Blanes Municipal Archives (AMBL) preserve Bataller's valuable personal collection of art, a collection of thousands of photos standing as testimony to the artist's gifted vision. Upon receipt of the donation, the Blanes Town Council made public one of the lesser known facets of Bataller's artistry: photography. The publication of a catalogue and an exposition that followed (Els paradisos de Rafael Bataller) established the artist as painter-photographer.

With these two publications, the world bore witness to the four places that would immortalize Rafael Bataller. The artist discovered Formentera in 1956 when the island was still practically untouched, and, shortly thereafter, he decided to make it the site of his summer refuge.

Bataller's paintings of this slice of the Balearics achieved immense global success following a sign commissioned in 1971 by the Directorate General of Tourism. His paintings of the waters of Formentera are what earned Bataller the nickname 'the painter of Formentera'.

Bataller's discovery of la Vall d'Aran gave the artist the opportunity to witness the spectacle of snow-draped landscapes. He would return to the area many winters, fascinated by the rapid transformation of colours upon the Pyrenees. Finally, the painter's fourth paradise was Paris. After an initial trip in 1950 taken toward the end of his studies, Bataller returned perennially to the so-called City of Lights; urban picturescapes and bridges are dominant themes in his Parisian paintings.

Blanes Town Council Posthumous Homage

20 December is the anticipated start date of an exposition of paintings by Rafael Bataller to be held at Casa Saladrigas gallery of Blanes. This particular selection of paintings is the fruit of a long-running project by the artist's dearest friends, and was thus a natural choice for the Blanes Town Council when rendering posthumous homage to their native son.

Organisers have named the exposition Respirant art: Rafael Bataller, Charo de Oteiza i els seus amics artistes (Breathing art: [...] and their artist friends). It is comprised primarily of paintings from Bataller's collection of art.