

HABITUS ET PRAXIS: BODY, CLOTHING, AND TRADITION

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COMUNIÓN EN ALQUÉZAR, S/F, DIRECT CARBON ON FRESSON PAPER. VEGAP, PAMPLONA, 2026

What is the relationship between how we dress and our way of life? Can a garment speak to what we believe, the community to which we belong, or the practices we repeat every day?

Habitus et Praxis: Body, Clothing, and Tradition explores the range of meanings carried by the word habit. A habit can be a garment, such as a monk's or a nun's habit, but it can also be an action learned through repetition until it becomes part of our daily lives. Dressing and living are bound together: what we wear on our bodies can reveal a way of relating to the world.

Through a selection of photographs by José Ortiz Echagüe, the exhibition invites viewers to observe clothing not as an isolated element, but in relation to the bodies that wear it, the spaces they occupy, and the actions they perform. A tunic, a piece of traditional dress, or a religious habit takes on its meaning within a community and a particular way of life.

This interpretation engages with the concept of *habitus*, developed by the French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu.

Through this term, Bourdieu explains how ways of thinking, acting, and relating to others are largely acquired through social experience. We do not learn solely through written rules, but also by observing, repeating gestures, and participating in rituals and practices shared with others. Over time, these experiences become part of us, shaping our gestures, behaviors, and perception of the world.

The body thus becomes the place where culture is made visible.

The photographs brought together in this exhibition belong to the world of *España mística* (1943), a series in which Ortiz Echagüe turned his gaze toward various manifestations of the religious sphere. Monks, seminarians, the devout, children, pilgrims, and *nazarenos* (the hooded members of Holy Week confraternities) are shown praying, walking, eating, participating in ceremonies, or simply gathered together. The exhibition highlights the shift from portraiture toward action, allowing us to understand these images as a record of a *praxis*: a way of acting in the world and inhabiting it.



OFERTANTES EN CASTROCONTRIGO, S/F, DIRECT CARBON ON FRESSON PAPER. VEGAP, PAMPLONA, 2026

The exhibition does not seek to explain the Catholic religion through its doctrines, but rather to observe how a belief becomes an experience. What happens when faith ceases to be merely an abstract idea and begins to shape a community's rhythms, bodies, attire, and spaces? What do we learn through repetition? What part of our identity is shaped by what we do over and over again?

The exhibition begins with an introduction to the process through which Ortiz Echagüe transformed those experiences into images: direct carbon printing on Fresson paper. The tour continues with photographs that reveal the intimacy of monastic life, and concludes with images of shared spaces. Visitors move from prayer, silence, and the routines of the monastery to pilgrimages, offerings, and processions in which religious practice becomes collective.

The three sections (direct carbon printing on Fresson paper, monastic life, and popular spirituality) allow us to observe three interrelated dimensions: representing, inhabiting, and practicing.

José Ortiz Echagüe: Photographing a World in Transition

José Ortiz Echagüe (Guadalajara, 1886 – Madrid, 1980) holds a prominent place in the history of 20th-century Spanish photography. A photographer, engineer, and businessman, he pursued his photographic work alongside a professional career in aviation and industry: he founded the aircraft manufacturer CASA and later presided over SEAT.

This coexistence of industrial modernity and an attachment to tradition is key to understanding his photography. While his professional life embraced the technological advances of his time, his camera was frequently trained on customs, architecture, landscapes, and communities that he perceived as testimonies to a world in transformation.

Ortiz Echagüe traveled through numerous regions, photographing ways of life he considered closely bound up with the identity of each place. His interest went beyond documenting how people dressed: he sought to record ways of life that he saw as threatened by change, as they were lived out in the actions of those who inhabited those places. The surroundings, the architecture, the positioning of bodies, and the activities they engaged in were fundamental elements of his compositions.

A key moment in the development of this perspective was his stay in North Africa. There, he developed an interest in ways of life tied to the preservation of certain traditions. Upon his return, that interest continued during his travels throughout Spain, in a context marked by intense debates about modernization, identity, and social transformation.

His work can also be understood within a cultural moment in which various Spanish intellectuals and artists were questioning the country's identity. Following the crisis of 1898, writers associated with the so-called Generation of '98 turned their attention to the land, the landscape, customs, and history as frameworks through which



CISTERCIENSES, C. 1945, DIRECT CARBON ON FRESSION PAPER. VEGAP, PAMPLONA, 2026

to reflect on Spain. Ortiz Echagüe shared that generation's concern for a tangible and intangible heritage that seemed threatened by the transformations of modernity.

This interest gave rise to his photographic series, later published as *España. Tipos y trajes* (1930), *España. Pueblos y paisajes* (1939), *España mística* (1943), and *España. Castillos y alcázares* (1956). Each series offers a distinct perspective on the country and its inhabitants.

In *España. Tipos y trajes*, clothing takes center stage. Regional dress, fabrics, accessories, and the ways in which garments are worn serve as signs of belonging. But Ortiz Echagüe did not photograph these elements as independent objects; rather, he constructed scenes in which clothing, the body, and the surroundings together generated meaning. The exhibition draws attention to the carefully staged nature of many of these compositions.

España mística, the central focus of this exhibition, directs our gaze toward the realm of religious practice. The interest no longer lies solely in what the subjects are wearing, but in what they are doing while wearing it.

This distinction is fundamental to *Habitus et Praxis*.

Ortiz Echagüe's photographs may appear to be direct testimonies of the past. However, each image was constructed, which involved a series of choices: where to position the camera, what to include and what to exclude, when to take the shot, how to light the scene, how to arrange the subjects, and, finally, how to produce the

print. The artist paid special attention to these choices; as a result, his photographs straddle the line between documentation and interpretation. We do not simply see what Spain was like; we see how Ortiz Echagüe chose to represent it.

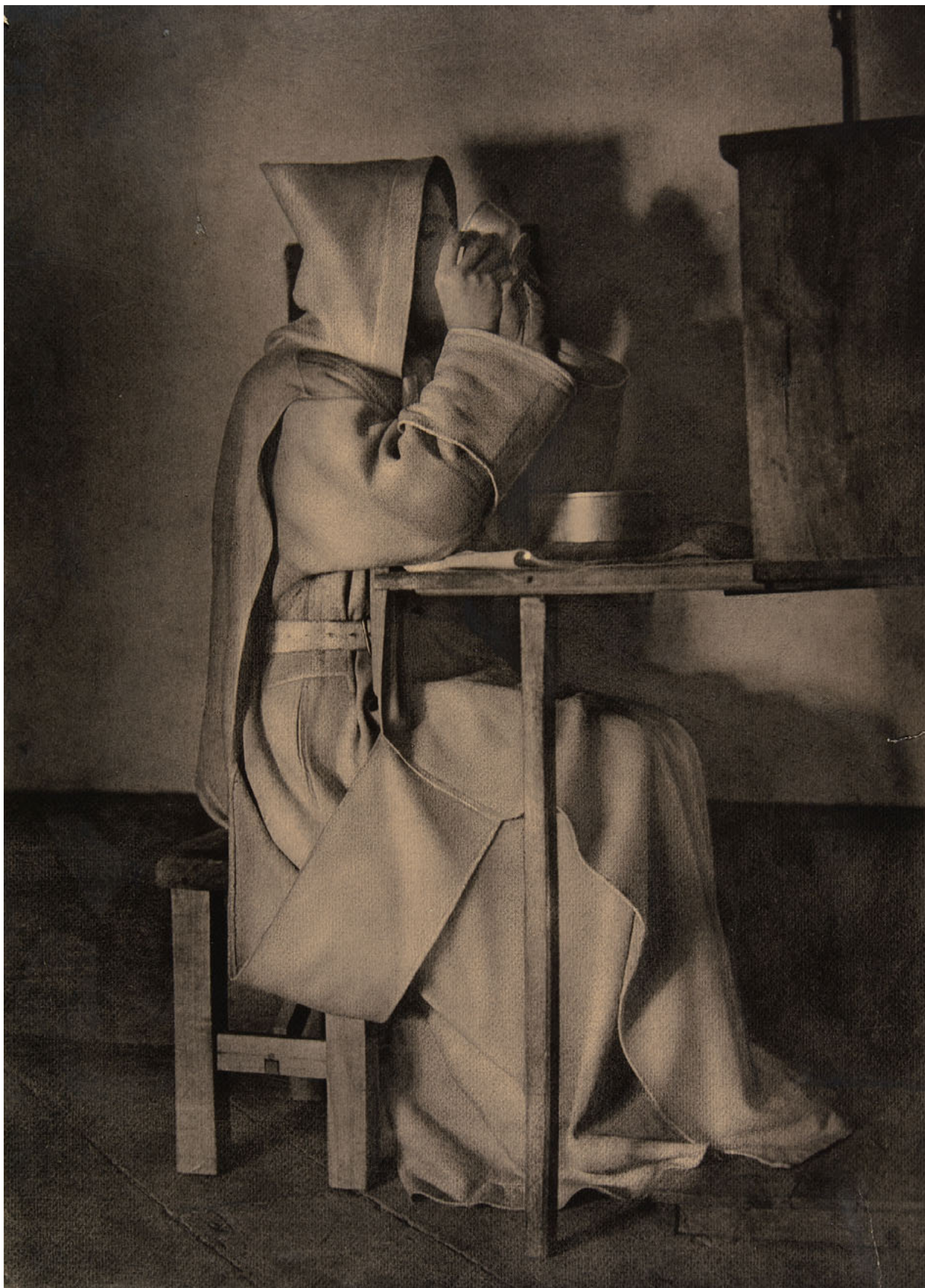
Recognizing this dimension helps us understand a body of work that is neither strictly documentary nor merely pictorial, made by a photographer whose gaze is shaped by aesthetic and narrative intent. The images contain information about clothing, architecture, rituals, and social practices, but they also reflect the photographer's aesthetic sensibility and cultural interests.

The camera records reality and, at the same time, constructs an image of it.

From this perspective, Ortiz Echagüe can be understood as both an observer of and a participant in a process of transformation. He sought to preserve what he considered worth preserving, but in doing so he also selected, arranged, and idealized. This tension between memory, documentation, and interpretation runs throughout the entire exhibition.

1. Direct carbon printing on Fresson paper: Constructing the image

The first section invites viewers to turn their gaze toward the person behind the camera. How were these photographs created?



CARTUJO EN LA CELDA, 1950, DIRECT CARBON ON FRESSON PAPER. VEGAP, PAMPLONA, 2026

Throughout his career, Ortiz Echagüe developed a close relationship with direct carbon printing on Fresson paper, a technique that contributed decisively to the characteristic appearance of his images. This section highlights the continuity of this technique within his body of work and its importance for understanding his visual language.

It is a traditional, artisanal process based on mineral pigments that allow for a wide variety of shades of gray and black. In contrast to the speed and standardization that other photographic processes were gradually adopting, the Fresson process required careful preparation and significant manual intervention.

Before arriving at the final image, the process requires additional intermediate steps that entail a gradual loss of information as the image is transferred from one medium to another, but which allow the photographer to control the appearance of the final print directly. From the original negative, a positive is produced on a transparent support (rigid or flexible). This positive is then projected through an enlarger to produce an enlarged negative on paper, since the Fresson print is made by contact. The final image is printed on pigment-coated paper, which is exposed to sunlight in contact with this negative, so that the coating becomes more or less insoluble depending on the amount of light it receives. Finally, the print is washed in a bath of water mixed with sawdust, which removes the pigment that has not been rendered insoluble, thus revealing the final image.

Through this process, Ortiz Echagüe was able to work on specific areas of the image, modify contrasts, enhance highlights and shadows, and control the details of the final result. This is why his photographs have such a recognizable appearance: dense blacks, surfaces rich in tonal variation, and a texture that at times resembles charcoal drawing or painting.

The technique is not merely a matter of materials; it also determines how we perceive what was photographed.

Shadows heighten the solemnity of a religious scene. The texture of a robe can take on a special presence. Light can set a face apart from the background or draw our attention to a particular gesture. What happened in front of the camera is transformed by the decisions made before, during, and after the photographic exposure.

At this point, the concept of “habit” takes on yet another meaning. Ortiz Echagüe also had his own habits: observing, selecting, composing, waiting, developing, and intervening. Repeated practice of the same technique ultimately shaped a recognizable photographic language.

Three senses of *habit* thus run through the exhibition.

- » We encounter the photographer’s own habit.
- » We observe the habit as clothing.
- » We discover the habit as an ingrained practice.

2. Monastic life: Wearing a way of life

The second section explores different monastic communities. Here, the meaning of the word *habit* becomes immediately apparent: the garment identifies the monk and expresses his membership in a particular religious community.

However, putting on a habit means much more than simply changing clothes. Life in a monastery involves adopting specific rhythms, rules, and practices. The day is organized around set times for prayer, work, reading, meals, silence, or rest. These activities are repeated daily and shape a particular relationship with time, the body, spaces, and others.

The selected photographs offer a glimpse into different moments of this experience. Ortiz Echagüe portrays communities gathered in the choir, monks in the refectory, solitary figures in their cells, walks, encounters, and ceremonies. The selection includes images of Carthusians, Cistercians, and Franciscans. We encounter scenes where repetition is fundamental.

Those who enter a religious community gradually learn a specific way of being: of keeping silent, praying, eating, walking, and interacting with others. Many of these practices eventually become second nature because they have been internalized. Here, *habitus* reemerges: what has been learned ceases to feel like an external rule and becomes part of one’s own behavior.

The images allow us to focus on the small details. Although the habits of different orders may look alike at first glance, their details make it possible to distinguish communities, roles, and hierarchies. Clothing makes a shared identity visible.

But Ortiz Echagüe’s interest does not end with clothing. His photographs show the body in action.

In *Refectorio cartujo*, for example, the space, the arrangement of the people, and the repetition of the figures help us understand the communal dimension of an everyday activity such as eating. In the photographs taken during rituals or moments of prayer, individual gestures are integrated into a shared action. In other images, the solitary figure of the monk introduces the contemplative dimension of that life.

Even death forms part of this ritual structure. The works dedicated to the burial of a Carthusian monk reveal how a community also incorporates the act of saying goodbye into its shared practices.

This part of the exhibition therefore invites us to observe the interplay between garment and action, and the body as the place where the two meet. The garment we see on the body is the outward manifestation of a less visible reality: the habit of living in a certain way.

3. Popular spirituality:

When practice becomes collective

The final section gradually moves away from the intimacy of the monastery and out into the streets and shared spaces. Here, religious experience takes on a public and collective dimension.

Processions, pilgrimages, offerings, and celebrations bring together people who, for a specific period of time, share a space, certain gestures, and a way of presenting themselves to others. This section brings together images of these actions, in which clothing plays a fundamental role.



PENITENTES EN MÁLAGA, C. 1940, DIRECT CARBON ON FRESSON PAPER. VEGAP, PAMPLONA, 2026

Unlike the monastic habit, which permanently accompanies a way of life, these outfits are worn only at specific times: dressing for a religious event involves temporarily assuming a role within the ritual.

The costume signals that something is happening. The person who dresses as a *nazareno* to take part in a procession transforms, for a few hours, their appearance and their relationship with everyday space. The street ceases to be merely a thoroughfare and becomes a ceremonial stage. Walking takes on a new meaning. The silence, the music, the body's posture, and the relationship with the religious images create a shared cultural experience.

When comparing processions photographed in different locations, differences emerge in the costumes, the arrangement of the participants, and the forms of the ritual. However, we also find common elements such as solemnity and the collective construction of an extraordinary space within everyday life.

Habitus can be recognized in the unwritten norms that allow one to participate in these events: where to stand, how to walk, when to stop, how to dress, or how to behave. This knowledge is passed down through participation and repetition.

Photographs featuring children raise another important question: How is a tradition learned? Children observe, accompany, and participate. Even before fully understand-

ing the religious meaning of a ceremony, they learn its gestures, timing, and behaviors. Tradition is not transmitted solely through stories or instructions; it is also passed on through the body, by imitation.

The photographs taken along the road to El Rocío, the pilgrimage to the shrine of the Virgen del Rocío in Almonte (Huelva), held at Pentecost, reveal the festive, itinerant side of Catholic practice. The attire identifies the context, but it is people's actions that ultimately give it meaning.

Thus, the journey takes us from the private sphere to a shared experience: from the habits that structure daily life to the habits that publicly signal a sense of belonging.

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Habitus et Praxis does not, therefore, propose viewing these photographs solely as testimonies of a Spain of the past. It invites us to observe how people construct ways of life through what they wear, do, repeat, and share; at the same time, it shows how a photograph can transform those experiences into memory.

Ortiz Echagüe's images depict traditions that he perceived as undergoing transformation, but they also raise a question that remains open: What practices, gestures, and ways of relating to one another are we adopting today, and what do they say about our own way of inhabiting the world?



ANTE LA VIRGEN DEL ROCÍO, C. 1940, DIRECT CARBON ON FRESSON PAPER. VEGAP, PAMPLONA, 2026

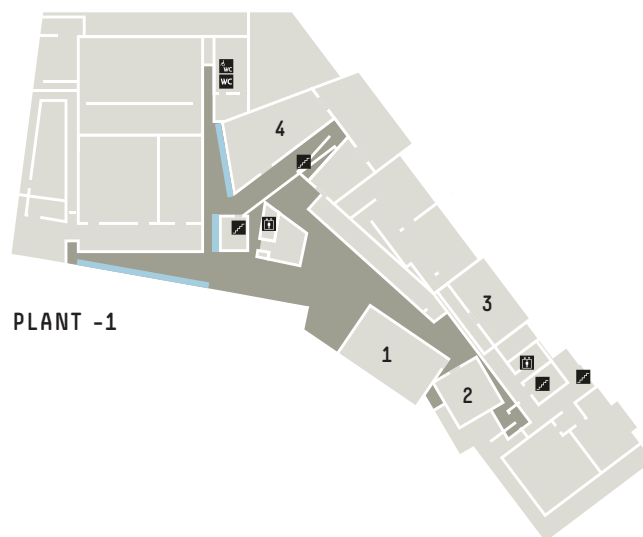


CRUCEROS DE RONCESVALLES, 1945, CARBÓN DIRECTO AL PAPEL FRESSON. VEGAP, PAMPLONA, 2026

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