

INFRALOCUS

THE 90S IN GIRONA,
A 20-YEAR DECADE

CURATORS,
EUDALD CAMPS
AND JORDI MITJÀ

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PHOTO CRÈDIT: MARÇAL MOLAS. PROTESTA CONTRA LES OBRES DE LA N-II. 1991. INSPAL. DIPUTACIÓ DE GIRONA

BÒLIT_LARAMBLA, BÒLIT_POUODÓ, BÒLIT_STNICOLAU
GIRONA HISTORY MUSEUM

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WHAT IS INFRALOCUS?

INFRALOCUS is an open project devoted to contemporary cultural archaeology.

It is “**OPEN**” because it is not intended to be exhaustive or definitive. The dearth of initiatives aimed at showcasing the diverse (counter) cultural activity that took place in Girona in this period (1985-2005) is enough in itself to justify an attempt to draw a rough sketch of it. The artists, spaces and initiatives featured in the exhibition are, in this sense, interchangeable: the goal is to put the spotlight on that which is in danger of remaining invisible, to give voice to that which has generally been omitted from the official historiography, as well as to examine a set of uncritically held assumptions.

It is “**ARCHAEOLOGY**” because it studies the (recent) past through its material (and immaterial) remains. One of the main characteristics of INFRALOCUS is that it has gathered, in the form of conversations/interviews, the voices of some of the leading cultural figures of the period. Twenty years later, they can all provide a measured look at a creative landscape that is somewhat turbulent and, as we have already mentioned, inexplicably under-explored. As in Edgar Allan Poe’s famous short story, *The Purloined Letter*, we often fail to see that which is hiding in plain sight.

It is “**CULTURAL**” in the broadest sense: INFRALOCUS is committed to replacing the concept of “counterculture” or “alternative culture” with that of “expanded culture”. In essence, this involves reviving the old avant-garde dream of merging art and life: while the Fundació Espais and the Municipal Exhibition Halls of La Rambla were the highest-profile venues for contemporary culture in 90s Girona, nightclubs such as La Sala del Cel or Boomerang were bursting with vitality and embodied a real alternative.

It is “**CONTEMPORARY**” because it encompasses a well-defined historical period. INFRALOCUS explores the dregs (or last gasp) of postmodernity. The excesses of French post-structuralism, or their poor digestion, paved the way for the pessimism and self-absorption of a generation that lived through the twilight of utopias following the events of May 68. At the same time, however, the generation born in the post-Francoist 1970s brought about a revival of utopian thinking in the form of political activism (feminism, LGBTQ+, environmentalism...) or, as we have touched upon, an expansion of the cultural sphere, especially in the field of electronic and urban music.

Last but not least, INFRALOCUS is also a tribute, albeit an indirect one, to the local press. The defunct Nou Diari, El Punt or Diari de Girona fulfilled their function as chroniclers of all things local with flying colours; given that national publications tend to ignore everything that occurs beyond the metropolitan area of Barcelona, the archive material of these outlets has been of crucial importance in putting together this exhibition.

PUBLIC PROGRAMME

FRIDAY 18 AND SATURDAY 19 OCTOBER FROM 12 TO 5 P.M

WALL PAINTING OF "THE FOOL "

With Pep Admetlla and Jordi Amagat

Carrer Nou del Teatre

WEDNESDAY 6 NOVEMBER AT 18:30

SURVIVING THE CONTEXT: two artistic perspectives on the 90s

With Roser Oliveras and Montserrat Costa, moderated by Eudald Camps

Girona History Museum

SATURDAY 23 NOVEMBER AT 12:00

THE STREETS HAVE ALWAYS BEEN OURS

With Isidre Pallàs

Departure point: Bòlit_LaRambla

Barri Vell (Old Quarter) of Girona

WEDNESDAY 27 NOVEMBER AT 18:30

DISMANTLING UTOPIAS: the fight for equality

With Puri Molina, Carme Vinyoles and Manel Bayo, moderated by Sílvia Planas

Girona History Museum

SATURDAY 14 DECEMBER AT 11:30

SATURDAY 25 JANUARY 11:30

GUIDED TOURS OF THE EXHIBITION

With Jordi Mitjà and Eudald Camps

Bòlit_StNicolau

SATURDAY 11 JANUARY AT 12:00

AN IMPROMPTU PARTY. Literary aperitif

Organised by La Penyora

Bòlit_LaRambla

SATURDAY 8 FEBRUARY AT 18:00

BEYOND 'EL CARRER DELS TORRATS'. The sound of the 90s in Girona

With Xavi Castellón and Gerard Quintana

Concert by Lluís Bonaventura + Jordi Mitjà - Selector

Girona History Museum and La Carbonera

GIRONA HISTORY MUSEUM

Starting from the end of the 80s and continuing through the 90s (and, in fact, right up to the present day), Girona has undergone a profound urban transformation that has clearly entailed far-reaching changes to the city's social fabric and to its leisure and cultural scenes. But the real (and symbolic) origin of this process dates back to a slightly earlier time, specifically to 1983, when the grey and sombre city decided to burst into colour; this was when Enric Ansesa and Jaume Faixó put together the project that made it possible to redraw the promotional (and, no doubt, more international) image of Girona, incorporating a broad range of colours.

A bold colour scheme was implemented for the houses over the Onyar River. This was followed by the transformation of the historic centre, which, with the Strategic Plan of the Barri Vell (Old Quarter) (1983) as its starting point, also entailed the discovery of the Call (Jewish Quarter) and its history. Those were times when the goings on in the still-young state of Israel were looked upon favourably, which generated enthusiasm for recovering the shared mediaeval history of the Call.

The point is that while the city was busy reinventing itself, and enjoying the results, various social and neighbourhood movements were calling into question the wisdom of what amounted to a process of gentrification: the closing of historic bars such as La Trumfa or La Placeta, rising prices in previously run-down areas that had been a magnet for students of the University of Girona and, in short, acute contrasts between a prosperous city that was looking past the present to the future and an activism that was concerned with the AIDS crisis, the incipient animal rights

movement and environmentalism (at times steeped in punk aesthetics and ideology, a constant feature of the numerous fanzines published at the time) and, in particular, protests related to LGBTQ+ rights and feminism, embodied in the struggle begun by the women's association Casal de la Dona.

The fact is that women participated massively in social struggles: anti-NATO demonstrations, pacifist movements, and all manner of causes involving a desire to create a fairer, more progressive and more egalitarian society. Little by little, however, the feminist struggle became institutionalised: political parties integrated feminist demands in their programmes, mainstreaming what had begun as a revolutionary and transgressive movement. The Casal de la Dona folded at the end of the 80s and, in the spirit of the movements of the time, ended up being restructured in a place that acted as a unifier: La Lluna, a bar on Carrer Ballesteries, which in 1986 had changed its name to Bar Tabarca.

Last but not least, in this landscape of contrasts, it is important to highlight initiatives such as those implemented by the Public Projects group: captained by the artists Quim Serrano and Antoni Selvaggi, and open to anyone wishing to take part, its work still perturbs us today due to the continued relevance of its messages of clear denunciation.

BÒLIT_POURODÓ

In the summer of 1994 (from 21 July to 30 September) the City History Museum held an exhibition offering an overview of "Five Years of Contemporary Art" through "50 Proposals of the Municipal Exhibition Halls" on La Rambla de Girona. In the words of the city's mayor at the time, Joaquim Nadal, "The goal was to open up the world of plastic arts, creation and experimentation, to present new names and young, recent, innovative works, to discover and grasp the scope of the most recent artistic contributions [...]. And it was also aimed at fostering the creation of a municipal contemporary art collection."

That genuinely institutional initiative (the city council and the savings bank Caixa de Catalunya were its promoters), which came to fruition thanks to the combined efforts of politicians and art managers and experts, served as the basis for sketching out a provisional map of Girona's art scene; a map which, looking back now, inevitably provokes a bittersweet feeling, since many of the artists who showed their work on that occasion did not gain access to the main international art circuits. As such, in the continued absence of a Contemporary Art Museum, the municipal art collection remains no more than that - a collection.

Nevertheless, we should highlight and reappraise a series of works which, despite having been created by means of a traditional artistic medium, namely painting, and having been shown within a regulated (and, as we have mentioned, institutional) context, were ideologically positioned in favour of a no-holds-barred progressivism.

In the words of Jordi Font, one of the managers at the time of the Fundació ESPAIS (a foundation devoted to contemporary art),

"Dissent does not necessarily have to be related to working with new technologies [...] or to working within politically organised groups, but rather it is also possible to produce radical work of impeccable ethical relevance within traditional disciplines such as painting."

The collage created by Pere Noguera on a surface of Tetra Brik cartons, which is the first piece in the exhibition at Bòlit's main centre, is the perfect embodiment of this idea.

In parallel, initiatives also came to fruition whose radicality might surprise us today: the "Giròtica" exhibition, curated by the art critic Jaume Fàbrega, which opened on 20 May 1986 at the Joker room, was one of the first of its kind to be held in Catalonia. Meanwhile, artists such as Maria Àngels Feliu, Montserrat Costa, Quim Corominas, Lluís Hortalà or Pep Camps, self-exiled in his search for artificial paradises, brought fresh air to the Girona of the time, as captured so well by the camera lens of Moisès Tibau (also the author of the images of Anna Rovira in her Espai 18 contemporary dance venue).

The closing piece of the exhibition is an extraordinary creation by Espigolé (1992) that connects the experience of exhibition rooms to urban action. On this occasion, we propose a rereading and updating of the work in installation format, a fusion of painting, fashion and life transmuted into a creative impulse.

BÒLIT_LARAMBLA

Is it possible to create art without institutional support? Where does culture originate? A home video featuring the rappers Metro and DJ Soyez rehearsing (1996) offers one possible answer. In the words of the latter, who hails from the town of Salt: *"Music is imposed, kids listen to what's popular in the mainstream. That's right! What they hear in clubs, etc. It's commercial stuff. But I've got the capacity to make up my own mind, and I opt to go against the grain. People think I'm a weirdo because on I'm sticking graffiti tag stickers on letterboxes and spraying graffiti on trains at 26 years of age. I get a kick out of my attitude, my secret behaviour, because I'm on the side of illegality".*

Illegal or not, at the end of the 80s and throughout the 90s, Girona's creative energy shifted to the outskirts with groups such as LaTecnika, formed by Metro & Soyez, who later became better known as members of Geronación (1991), or Ariadna Puello, a true pioneer of the Spanish female hip-hop scene, with albums such as Gancho perfecto (Perfect Hook) (1999).

The case of Puello, or Ari, as she is popularly known, is the perfect embodiment of a reality that tends to go under the radar in "mainstream" Girona: born in the Dominican Republic, she arrived in Catalonia when she was just eight years old, later settling in the Girona neighbourhood of Sant Narcís, in the summer of 1993: *"From there, I'd often head to La Maret, in Salt, an old cured sausage factory that was occupied in December of that year by the squatter movement, which was very active at that time. Salt was full of all these rappers, graffiti artists and breakdancers..."*

and I said to myself: this is my scene and I want to be a part of it. So I got involved, with the Latino sisterhood and Bano... Salt city is where it's happening."

Be that as it may, dissent and an alternative to the official narrative also materialised in the city centre. Right from the start, the cultural association LA PENYORA, led by Consol Ribas and Lluís Llamas, operating from the restaurant of the same name on Carrer Nou del Teatre, championed artists including Ariadna Puello or Geronación, booking them for some of the many festivals it organised over the course of the 90s, such as "Mobiliari urbà" ("Urban Furniture") (1999). Ajoblanco, the Spanish monthly magazine, published an editorial on the scene in its October 93 issue (no. 56), on the occasion of the festival "...E la nave va" ("And The Ship Sails On"), one of the association's most successful initiatives: *"The stereotype of Girona as a small, peaceful, restful and – dare we say – culturally dead city has just been shattered from its very core: the Mercè neighbourhood, in the heart of the old quarter, has blown up the cultural stagnation of officialdom by bringing into play dynamic alternative actions that until recently were conspicuous by their absence."*

Alternative actions, or festivals such as "...E la nave va", but also "Cocktail Art" (1995), "Tecnochoc" (1997) or the inestimable "La fiesta está en mi culo" ("The Party's in My Arse") (2004)...



BÒLIT_STNICOLAU

The conceptual core of everything that visitors can see and listen to in the Sant Nicolau venue is Girona's nightlife in the 90s, featuring in its most celebrated venues, their hugely diverse crowds and the physical remains of the scene, such as an old poster of the El Cercle bar, the sculpture of a head that "appeared" in the Onyar River, one-of-a-kind publications such as the Boomerang nightclub magazine, and a fascinating collection of graphic materials.

In the apse of the old chapel, the protagonist is the legendary nightclub La Sala del Cel. Inaugurated by businessman Josep Pérez in 1982 as a ballroom and concert hall, it occupied the building of the old parish church of the Pedret district following a comprehensive refurbishment. However, in its infancy, the venue proved somewhat unclassifiable. Enric Rubio is a former customer who has studied its history: "It was a place with all sorts of eccentricities, such as fortune tellers who'd read your cards, hypnosis sessions, tattoo artists, masseuses, exhibitions – including one devoted to the work of the painter Marco Schmon, inaugurated with a horror show by the Sator group – and a magic festival featuring the Pera Magic Machine."

Nevertheless, La Sala del Cel will be remembered for its contribution in the field of electronic music: key groups such as FAX or Catarsi, with Lluís Bonaventura and Lluís Calderón, or ABside (Bonaventura's solo project), helped to slowly transform Girona's nightclub music scene (they were pioneering for Spain) thanks to a very forward-thinking (and, seen in perspective, almost prophetic) vision for the time. The care taken by figures such as Xavi Montojo (a photographer who

had worked at the club) to preserve images and recordings has made it possible to rescue eyewitness accounts which, without these documents, were in danger of disappearing or quite simply of not existing.

Meanwhile, the nave of the Chapel of Sant Nicolau is devoted to enhancing other venues of the nightlife scene. Highlights include more than 250 photographs of customers of the Nummulit bar, taken by its then owner, Pim Colomer, or an original drawing by the Madrid-born artist Ceesepe (real name Carlos Sánchez Pérez), who is a wonderful example of how so-called high culture can be colonised by popular culture: having forged a career in the world of comics, he became one of the stars of ARCO 84 and one of the key movers and shakers of the movida madrileña (Madrid scene), which occasionally stretched its tentacles as far as Girona..

The inverse was also true: established artists or those with a certain presence in institutional settings contributed to defining the particular iconography of Girona's nightlife, especially as far as the Boomerang club was concerned. With their singular vision, Montserrat Costa, Quim Corominas, Pau Baena, Paco Torres Monsó, Roser Oliveras or Pep Camps, among others, lit up Girona's long nights at end of the 80s and throughout the 90s.



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