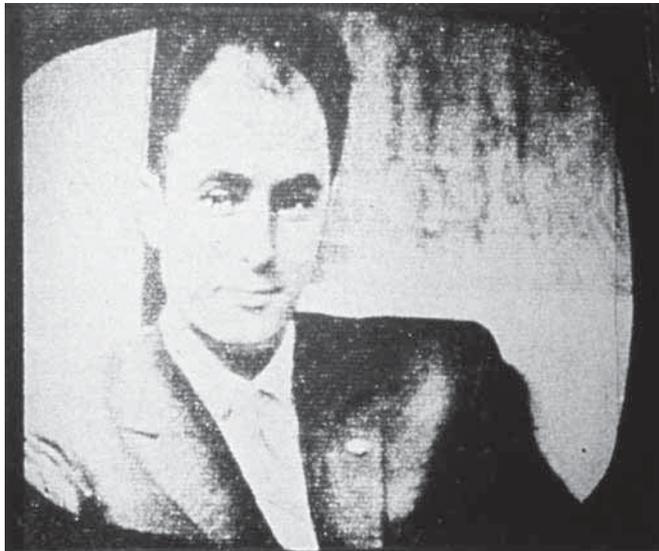


Is Spain Really Different? Teresa Grandas

Art and Francoism

The second half of the 20th century in Spain was marked by the dictatorship of General Franco from 1939—after three years of Civil War that did away with the Second Republic—until his death in 1975, which signaled the beginning of the democratic reconstruction of the country.

In 1969 one of the biggest business scandals in Spain at the time broke. It was significant not only for its widespread economic consequences but also for its political implications. The company in question, Matesa, had swindled the Spanish government out of thousands of millions of pesetas through the fraudulent use of credits for the export of textile machinery. The Catalan businessman, Juan Vilá Reyes,¹ a member of the ultraconservative Catholic Opus Dei and with close ties to several of Franco's ministers, was accused of unlawful appropriation of government funds and sent to prison.



Later, in 1976, the artist Eulàlia Grau created a work entitled *...Inventemos también nosotros...* ("We, too, can invent"). This parallel narrative tells the story of the businessman Vilá

¹ "Suddenly Matesa ceased to be the project that, according to Vilá Reyes, 'summed up the human virtues of sacrifice, effort, risk and ambition... an example that we wished to convey,' to turn into a scandal." Bernat Muniesa, *Dictadura y monarquía en España. De 1939 hasta la actualidad*, Editorial Ariel, Barcelona 1996, p. 124.

Eulàlia Grau,
...We, too, can invent...,
1976, silver halide
photographic print on
wood with printer ink on
silver paper. Detail of one
photograph of a total of 21,
artist's collection,
© Eulàlia Grau, VEGAP,
Barcelona, 2012

Reyes and Diego Navarro, a construction worker who was wounded during a demonstration and detained by the Civil Guard. The story reveals that it was never revealed who shot him, nor which doctor saw him and refused to remove the bullet, and that he was put in prison in Tarragona where he was found hanging in his cell. The lack of information and absence of images in this narrative stand in direct contrast to the abundance of iconographic material documenting the industrial and social activity of the businessman. Vilá Reyes was pardoned in 1975 in spite of the severity of the charges, the prison sentence and the fine imposed on him. Eulàlia Grau's work makes use of the two diametrically opposed stories to highlight the unequal treatment and application of justice in the context of and relation to the social standing of the persons involved. The result was a polarized portrait of triumphant power and the losers.²

Several decades earlier, in 1937, in the midst of the Spanish Civil War, the anarchist syndicate CNT produced a film directed by Fernando Mignoni called *Nuestro Culpable* ("Our Guilty One"), a comedy satirizing bourgeois society and its relationship with justice. A thief is surprised in the act of robbing the house of a banker by the banker's mistress, who herself absconds with the loot. The alleged thief is unjustly apprehended and put in jail where he receives special treatment thanks to the protection of the banker. The apparent insignificance of the narrative does not exclude a criticism of the complex social framework of Spanish society at the time, and the mechanisms of economic and judicial power by which it was governed. Its underlying message is that the only way the bourgeois order can get around the law is via the genre/process of the picaresque. In this sense it is close to what Valle-Inclán termed an *esperpento*, the idea that one can take advantage of the decadence of Spanish society to ridicule, satirize and deform reality in a decidedly grotesque manner.³

Almost forty years separated Mignoni's film and Eulàlia Grau's work, almost the same number of years that this country spent living through one of the darkest periods in its history. On 18 July 1936 there occurred what the historian Pierre Vilar claimed was the "Military uprising" led by General Franco against the legal and democratically constituted Republican government. Three years later the Civil War was over, the rebel army had emerged victorious and a dictatorship was installed. The 1936 rebellion was consecrated as a "National Uprising"

² In this regard, Eulàlia Grau produced another interesting work: *Cancionero de los hombres verticales y de los hombres horizontales* (1975) ("Songs of the Vertical and Horizontal Men"), depicting the winners (vertical) and the victims and losers (horizontal).

³ "The tragic sense of Spanish life can only manifest itself with a systematically deformed aesthetic..., because Spain is a grotesque deformation of European civilisation." Valle-Inclán, *Lucas de Bohemia* (1924).

and in 1939 the dictatorial regime of General Franco was implanted in Spain that was to last until his death in 1975. Once the war—henceforth to be known as a heroic and evangelizing “crusade”—was over, the new regime devoted itself to persecuting and in effect annihilating the Republic and its followers as its *raison d'état*. Franco self-styled himself as “Caudillo de España por la Gracia de Dios” (“Caudillo of Spain by the Grace of God”), which gives us a clue as to the two great pillars of the new construction of the Francoist project: Catholicism and the military. This brings to mind Unamuno’s definition, in 1936, of the history of Spain as “the marriage between the sacristy and the barracks.” The Church dictated the moral order and controlled education from primary school through university. Spain, defined from then on as “*una, grande y libre*” (“one, great and free”), was transformed into an authoritarian and repressive state that censured any possible deviation from the conservative values that imposed themselves on a single, unified thought. Until 1950, Spain lived through a period of economic and political autarky. The United Nations’s condemnation of the new regime was accompanied by diplomatic isolation and the withdrawal of ambassadors. The declaration of the General Assembly of December 12, 1946 condemned the imposition by force of Francoism and its connivance with Nazism and Fascism. This news was covered in the NO-DO, the sole official newsreel created in 1942 to maintain “the proper guidelines for national cinematographic information”. From 1943 on it was shown in all the cinemas in the country before every film, and featured mass demonstrations of the Spanish people mobilized in support of Franco. Nevertheless, beginning in 1950, Spain’s strategic position in Europe and its potential for economic growth enabled the establishment of bilateral relations with the United States government, initiating a policy of loans to the regime. In this regard, we should mention the 1953 film *Bienvenido Mr. Marshall* (“Welcome, Mr. Marshall”), directed by Luis García Berlanga and written by Juan Antonio Bardem, two outstanding filmmakers of the period.

Because most of the prominent Spanish intellectuals had gone into exile, this left a notable absence of prominent (intellectual) figures in the Francoist ranks. The world of culture was reduced to a small nucleus, given that censorship filtered every aspect of publishing, radio, and public events, and its (explicit) presence

was felt only in demonstrations of a patriotic nature with a tendency toward Francoist exaltation and opportunism. During the 1940s culture took on a rather reactionary and backward-looking character, tending to shy away from any trace of innovation. In 1948, however, the first symptoms of the revitalization of an avant-garde began to appear in the Escuela Altamira, in Dau al Set (more attentive to the pre-war avant-garde) and in the first October Salons. On the other hand, by establishing a framework of economic cooperation with the United States, the regime itself was interested in presenting a more open image to counteract an unusual political situation. The Hispano-American art biennales, the first of which took place in Madrid in 1951, were diplomatic operations that facilitated the exhibition of abstract art in contrast to the earlier academicism. In this regard, most avant-garde art was used as propaganda to promote the regime abroad.⁴ The lectures on abstract art delivered during the summer course at Santander in 1953, in conjunction with the Exposición Internacional de Arte Abstracto, represented an attempt to normalize the artistic debate.⁵ Finally, the exhibition of American art organized by MoMA in Barcelona in 1955 confirmed Spain's inclusion in the circuits promoting American art, together with the signing of agreements with the United States and the admission of a diplomatic delegation to the United Nations.

President Eisenhower's visit to Spain in 1959 contributed to enhanced recognition for the regime at a time when it had decreed Abstract Expressionism (Informalism) to be the dominant tendency, and selectively promoted artists such as Tàpies, Saura, Millares, Oteiza or Chillida. It is interesting to note that while the most conservative informalist tendencies were being reinforced, the opposite was actually developing in architecture and design. Artists were already experimenting in these disciplines with the most advanced and transgressive innovations, in many cases under the auspices of civil society in the absence of public institutions. An example in architecture is Grup R (with Bohigas, Coderch, Sostres, Gili, Moragas, Valls and Pratsmajó), which created the pavilion at the 1951 Milan Triennial, combining architecture and design with ceramics, popular art and works by Miró. In this same line and in the following decade, the role of the design schools in Barcelona was fundamental. Eina, founded in 1967, taught art and design from a multidisciplinary perspective involving various types of

⁴ See Jorge Luis Marzo, *Art modern i franquisme. L'origen conservador de l'avantguarda i de la política artística a l'Estat espanyol*, Fundació Espais d'Art Contemporani, Girona 2007.

⁵ These lectures by Sebastià Gasch, Alexandre Cirici, Gaya Nuño, Jorge Oteiza, J. M. Moreno Galván and Camón Aznar, among others, were published under the title *El arte abstracto y sus problemas* (1956).

experiences.⁶ Many critics, philosophers and artists participated in Eina, where an important constituent of the artistic avant-garde later to emerge in the 1970s was trained.



⁶ An example of this is their workshop of tactile experiments with transparent inflatable tubes. A similar experiment was being carried out at the same time by the OHO group in Slovenia, which indicates the relevance of the multiple connections with experiments that were happening at the same time in other countries.

Photogram of the film *Plácido*, 1961, directed by Luis García Berlanga, courtesy of Jet Films

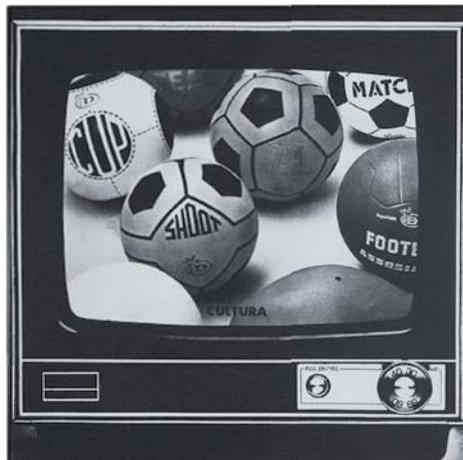
In 1961, Luis García Berlanga made the film *Plácido*, a satirical portrait of Spanish reality. The film depicted an ironic presentation of Christian charity understood as a way of salving the bourgeois conscience toward the underprivileged classes. Beneath the slogan “Ponga un pobre en su mesa” (“Seat a poor person at your table”), there is an unforgettable scene of a raffle for the poor for the chance to have Christmas dinner in the home of a wealthy family. It was biting commentary on a society that lacked everything, was extremely unequal and was governed by bureaucracy. A year later, Fraga Iribarne was appointed Minister of Information and Tourism. Censorship was reinforced in all types of media and communication, and in 1966 the new Press Law went into effect.⁷ Fraga was also responsible for launching the campaign to attract foreign tourists with the slogan “Spain is Different”. Thus, a pleasant, friendly, dynamic and carefree image of the country under the sun was projected. The Catalan artist Joan Rabascall satirized this image in a series of the same name between 1975 and 1977. The outline of the Iberian Peninsula on the one hand, and the shape of a television screen on the other both incorporated images of seaside tourist sites at the precise moment urban-driven speculation was beginning to invade and transform the country’s coastal beaches. These images were interspersed with

⁷ This law affected newspapers, magazines and the only television channel in the country, in addition to films, theater and literature. It remained in effect until after the death of Franco and, among other things, enabled the government to confiscate anything that attacked the Falangist movement and its principles.

imaginary everyday populist life based on football, attending church and the sale of arms. This self-complacent iconography took place against a background of social malaise and the role of university resistance, strikes and the *Caputxinada*, a notorious incident that took place in Barcelona in 1966.⁸

The beginning of the 1960s saw the opening up of the art market with the recognition of Spanish Abstract Expressionism (Informalism) abroad—a fact that was further enhanced by Spain’s invitation to participate in the Venice and São Paulo Biennales. Parallel to this turn towards the culture of consumption was a highly politicised reflection, in art, on reality, as seen in the graphic work of Estampa Popular and other groups such as Equipo Crónica and Equipo Realidad. At the decade’s close and into the early 1970s, a series of developments unfolded in the artistic milieu that revolved around experimentation and the problematic considerations of the work of art itself, its means and circuits. At the same time—and in some cases—art was openly critical, both socially and politically. In addition to the developments at the design schools, other artists began collaborating with experimental spaces such as the Centro de Cálculo at the Universidad Complutense in Madrid, that from 1968 on organized seminars and exhibitions on the generation of plastic forms by means of computers.

⁸ This incident took place between 9 and 11 March 1966, when the police surrounded and broke into the Convent of the Capuchin Monks in Barcelona. Some 300 people from different spheres of life—social, cultural and clandestine political factions—had come together to constitute an assembly of the *Sindicat Democràtic d’Estudiants de la Universitat de Barcelona*.



Joan Rabascall, *Automatic Revolver* (from the series *Spain is Different*), 1975 MACBA Collection, MACBA Foundation.
© Joan Rabascall, VEGAP, Barcelona, 2012, photo by Rocco Ricci

Joan Rabascall, *Culture* (from the series *Spain is Different*), 1975, MACBA Collection, MACBA Foundation.
© Joan Rabascall, VEGAP, Barcelona, 2012, photo by Rocco Ricci

The culture of consumerism, coupled with economic prosperity, had its repercussions in the domestic environment and life’s domestic necessities. The home was the ideological framework

by which the majority of the middle class consolidated its social position by means of the dwelling and its furnishings. As Alexandre Cirici remarked, the bourgeoisie, “satisfied with its feeling of security, experienced a particular craving for luxury, which showed itself in its preference for antiquated styles of homes and furniture. Imbued with the new ideas of history and hierarchy, it tried to emulate the aristocracy by bringing about a gigantic falsification of furniture, objects, tapestries and lamps in imitation of the ancient nobility.”⁹ Here we should mention the articles by *Jack el Decorador*¹⁰ (the alter ego of the writer Manuel Vázquez Montalbán) for the interior design magazine *Hogares Modernos*, published between 1969 and 1971. These articles were a kind of satirical chronicle on bourgeois taste, with war cries like “¡Guerra a la metalistería psicodélica!” (“Down with all this psychedelic metalwork”) and encouraging everyone to eat sardines with “¡Viva el rigodón y el porrón de vino tinto!” (“Long live the rigodoo[n] [dance] and the glass wine decanter”).¹¹ He ranted about the consumerist proliferation of monstrosities and the lack of good taste. This outcry against the excesses of the so-called society of wellbeing in contrast to the harshness of the very real social inequality, violence and injustice that prevailed was also reflected in some of the components of Eulàlia Grau’s *Etnografías* (1973–1974).¹² The home was also understood as the conceptual framework of the family that was ruled by paternal masculine authority. The husband not only constituted moral authority, but he was also the holder of legal power over his wife and/or daughter (who needed his permission to apply for a bank loan or a passport). This is an example of the tremendous inequality in the social consideration of women, who were assigned a subordinate role within the family. During the 1970s several artists portrayed and denounced this situation.¹³ The publication of photo romance novels aimed at a female audience contributed to the reinforcing of certain stereotypes about the woman who complements and helps the male figure and ends up surrendering to him for love, as in Eugènia Balcells’ work *Fin* (End) of 1977. These photo romance novels that sought to create expectations within a specific moral and social order contrasted greatly with the comics that proliferated in Spain during the 1970s within a circuit of marginal and counter-cultural publications. These comics were highly critical of bourgeois customs and were rife with explicit references to sex

⁹ Alexandre Cirici, *La estética del franquismo*, Gustavo Gili, Barcelona 1977, p. 149.

¹⁰ Jack the Decorator’ (in Spanish a play on words alluding to “Jack the Ripper”, the English serial killer).

¹¹ Quoted in “Las andanzas de Jack el Decorador. Ni se compra ni se vende el cariño verdadero. El Drugstor de Bilbao o la resurrección metálica de Gallardo,” *Hogares Modernos. La revista de la decoración, el mueble y la arquitectura*, no. 40, October 1969.

¹² She continued to develop this theme in a later work, *Vivendes... Vivendes* (1976), on how the home reflects the conditions of the life of its inhabitants and reveals its social inequalities.

¹³ Noteworthy examples of this are: *Standart* (1976) by Fina Miralles, *Discriminació de la dona* (1977) by Eulàlia Grau, the works of Esther Ferrer, Olga Pijuan, and the films and videos of Eugènia Balcells.

and drugs, in addition to linking up with other practices, alternative art and design spaces, bars and music venues. Nevertheless, their position was closer to anarchism than to actual political criticism. They were frequently subject to censorship owing to their offensive morals, sanctions, kidnappings, fines and trials, but they were highly prolific, and some even managed to exist for years. Barcelona served as an important center, together with Madrid, with smaller groups active in other cities like Valencia.



Manolo Quejido, *Boom*, 1976, MACBA Collection, MACBA Foundation. Gift of the Fundación Catalana Occidente, Manolo Quejido, VEGAP, Barcelona, 2012, photo by Tony Coll

The Matesa affair—which opens this essay—is interesting because of the political implications surrounding it. In 1965 the Opus Dei had brought about a change in government in order to control the mechanisms of the political future. Several ministers and important government officials were clearly implicated in Matesa because of their close association with the firm, and because they were directly responsible for the concession of the

fraudulent credits. Nevertheless, no one was brought to trial or prosecuted except the businessman. A campaign to dethrone the Opus by exposing the scandal was orchestrated by their opponents in the press, but this only succeeded in having some of its members removed and replaced with others from the same organization. The affair, however, was responsible for exposing the confrontation between the two powerful political factions; and Franco's difficulty in controlling them in the last years of his dictatorship. In June 1973 Admiral Carrero Blanco, an expert in dealing with the various political families and a symbol of continuity of the regime, was appointed Head of Government. But on December 20 of the same year a commando of the Basque terrorist organization, ETA, attempt on his life en route from the church he attended daily in Madrid.¹⁴ In 1977 the artist Ferran Garcia Sevilla presented, at the X Biennale de Paris, the work *Lectura per semblança i contacte de lletres, pedres i colors* (1974), a triptych comprised of the front and first two inside pages of *La Vanguardia*, one of the most prestigious Catalan newspapers, with images of the Admiral's car completely demolished—the explosion was so powerful that the car landed on top of a six-story building. In addition to the images and captions, Garcia Sevilla's analysis centered on the process of how the images were chosen, laid out and displayed, as well as the intent and arbitrariness of the media and censorship. The tragic feeling of the image forms a counterpoint for and complements the irony underlying the work, and takes us back to the *esperpentic* vision of Spanish society. This image has its pictorial correlate in the cartoons of 1974–1976 by the Seville-based artist Manolo Quejido. The uncomfortable climate created by Spain's political situation and its changes is clearly revealed in these works in which Quejido uses a traditional pictorial medium but overlays it with both a biting critical component, and a background personifying the social reality of the day. On September 27, 1975, barely two months before the death of the dictator on November 20, and in the last, dying moments of the regime, the execution of two ETA militants and three members of the FRAP (Frente Revolucionario Antifascista y Patriota) was ordered—the last of those to be condemned to death in the Franco era.

¹⁴ The assassination of Carrero Blanco hastened the executions by *garrote vil* of the Catalan anarchist Salvador Puig Antich and Georg Michael Welzel. Prior to this, in 1970, the death penalty had been overruled in the Burgos Trial against the ETA militants. Those who had been condemned to death had their sentences commuted in a gesture of "clemency" in the face of international pressure.

Translated from the Spanish by Selma Margaretten.