

L'Esclat dels còmics

8th November 2018 –
20th January 2019

ARTS SANTA MÒNICA
Centre de la creativitat

Curator: Enric Trilles

Sub-curator and graphic
designer: Valeria Suárez

Exhibition and assembly
design: Àlex Muñoz

Assembly: GAMI S.C.P.

Production:
Arts Santa Mònica
La Rambla, 7
08002, Barcelona
T. 935 671 110

More information:
artssantamonica.gencat.cat



SANTAMÒNICA

Then, suddenly, it occurred to someone that they did not have enough with just humorous characters, that there was another, more adult world of adventure out there. A world of adventurers like Buck Rogers and Tarzan, or the gangsters of Dick Tracy, who would give way to Secret Agent X-9 from a budding Alex Raymond and a tortured Dashiell Hammett. And then Madrake, Terry and the Pirates, Jungle Jim and Flash Gordon – both in one go. And the Arthurian saga of the great Prince Valiant: the best series that would ever be done on a character. The comic was growing up.

Comics were an industrial art, as much industry as art. Or more industry than an art. And the survival of their artists, better and better paid but never enough, was as important as their pride or their creative instinct. This premise defines Richard Felton Outcault, but also Ricard Opisso, Manuel Gago, Josep Sanchis or Francisco Ibáñez.

The art lay in combining pen and brush marks. Later the dry brush, dotted patterns and colour gradients were introduced. With two objectives. One was to go further and overcome the expressive barriers of earlier cartoonists. The other was to bring down the cost and speed up the production process. That is also industry. Soon, "studios" started to spread. Workshops or factories, depending on each case, of assistants and "ghost cartoonists" that inked and coloured the creators' lines.

Comic technique always moved between those two extremes. Responding to creators' artistic demands but, at the same time, producing quickly and reducing dispensable work as much as possible so they would make their obligatory daily or weekly appointment in a fit state. The comic was born out of art and industry. And its great creators had to remain equidistant. Leaning on one side of the scales has produced art or industry, but not comics.

As with other arts, fine or not so fine, comics have always been a school. A righteous school in the case of the United States between 1900 and 1940. Each cartoonist was superseded by another, who burst on the scene with all the previous knowledge gained from the published pages. Who influenced who? No creator is willing to accept that he or she is not unique in origin and trajectory. But influences there were. Suggested, clear, hidden, superimposed, multiplied, etc.

Original ideas, the relationship between a comic strip and illustration or painting, exchanges between creators, copies and plagiarism, tributes, fights, lawsuits and trials, teaching acknowledged and rejected, and so on. Comic strips in the United States in their most classical stage defined a world full of geniuses and mutual influences. Those who grabbed, in turn, let go. They came, blossomed and conquered.

The comic explosion in the United States spawned some characters which were so appealing and convincing that they quickly began to cross borders. North American daily strips and Sunday pages spread through France – where they surpassed local papers and magazines, which still had a 19th-century appearance – Italy and, from there, Spain. Readers and cartoonists of the "old" continent were quick to grasp the meaning of that adjective: they were old and "the other" was "new". The novelty of the United States fascinated them and North American comics opened their eyes. Firstly, those of European businessmen producing magazines for children and teenagers and, subsequently, those of artists stuck in the rigid moulds of their predecessors.

Very quickly, Felix the Cat, Mickey and all Disney's characters, including Popeye and many more stars of the North American fantasy firmament, entered European homes and started to be celebrated, while copies, plagiarised versions and derivatives multiplied. Soon after Tarzan, The Phantom and Flash Gordon appeared on American newsstands, the publishing house Vecchi "imported" them into Italy, enjoying huge success. And thanks to Lotario Vecchi then, later, his nephew, Jorge Parenti, they rapidly spread throughout Spain, featuring in: Yumbo (1934), Aventurero (1935) and Tim Tyler (1936). These three magazines, which catapulted publishers Hispano Americana de Ediciones into the



limelight, opened the door to the modern comic in Spain.

To build on this success, the Barcelona publishing house Molino took the heroes Parenti did not publish and put them in Mickey, a magazine launched in 1935 where Disney's characters, exclusively, added to the huge success they enjoyed at the cinema. The influence of this entire universe on Spanish cartoonists was enormous. Although TBO, the strongest, longest-running local magazine was apparently not suffering and refused to yield to the new styles, for example, speech bubbles, some of its cartoonists did. Like those of many other publishing houses. Who could resist?

The outbreak of war in 1936 cut short that success and that influence. Franco's victory weakened the names of North American heroes, at a time when the new Spanish regime was lining up with Italian Fascism and German Nazism. But publishers did not give up on the adventures and characters which had taken root among readers before the war and which would flourish in the post-war period. Thus, although publishers Hispano Americana hid the fact that Flash Gordon had been created by a North American author from the censors and portrayed him as "Flas" in order to "de-Americanize" him, and despite the fact that The Phantom did not fight against the Japanese on cartoon pages under Franco, but against an army with Japanese faces, uniforms and weapon that nobody would recognise as such, comic strips and whole pages of North American characters continued to be printed in Spain, while forbidden in Italy.

How can we deny the influence of those heroes, of that drawing style, on Manuel Gago or Jesús Blanco, to mention just two of the biggest names in comic strips in Franco's Spain? El Guerrero del Antifaz, Cuto, El Pequeño Luchador, even someone as Spanish as Roberto Alcázar, owed a great deal to the American heroes. Not everything, obviously, because Spanish tradition also carried some weight, but a lot. It is true that there was a clear influence of this "own" tradition on the scripts, which were inspired by both the North American series and the earlier Spanish soap operas. But there was also the "other" influence, although the new authorities played it down and tried to avoid it until the German star began to wane.

In children's and humorous cartoons, Disney hovered over the shadows of Emili Boix and Josep Sanchis. "Hipo, Monito and Fifi" or Pummy, Chivete and Blanquita, are Disney factory derivative characters. At publishers Editorial Valenciana, the alma mater, Josep Soriano Izquierdo, came from a tradition forged in the Catalan and Valencian satirical press, with a drawing style that linked him to L'Esquerra de la Torratxa or La Traca. His Jaimito, the character the magazine was named after, was like that, but he was also inspired by the influence of North American cinema. Sanchis, on the other hand, had already been through Disney's blender. Like the "Fallas" themselves until well into the 1970s.

Today, Spanish comics from the 1930s, whether humorous or realistic and produced mainly in Catalonia and the Valencia region, would have been something else without the solid presence of North American stories and heroes, which took hold among cartoonists and scriptwriters. Despite the initial Francoist rage, which considered "old Anglo-Saxon liberalism" finished, the strength of the comic that emerged with Yellow Kid imposed itself without any resistance. Post-war Spanish comic books are also an offspring of North American comics. Less so than in France, where the end of World War II imposed vetoes and censorship and boosted an art with unique claims, but just as in Italy. Today Mickey Mouse or Flash Gordon are as much ours and as "Spanish" as El Guerrero del Antifaz or Capitán Trueno, who would not pass a DNA test if someone else claimed other paternity.

With the perspective that time gives, no one can deny that everything American comics have given us in the subsequent decades, whether we want to acknowledge it or not, has always survived. Of course, there is a French-Belgian school, the Japanese have come a very long way with styles undeniably their own, while other styles have developed in other corners of the world too. That is all very true. As is humbly acknowledging the effect on world culture of some creators who felt as big as they wanted their bank accounts to be at the end of the month and who sweated ink for that. Glory to the heroes!



e'Esclat dels Còmics

CONTRASTOS I INFLUÈNCIES DELS GRANS
MESTRES DE LA HISTORIETA NORD-AMERICANA
(1895-1955)



Copyright Editorial Maga/Manuel Gago, 1962

The comic explosion

Contrasts and influences of the great masters of North American comic strips (1895-1955)

The comic strip, or "historieta" as we call it in Spanish, is such an important form of artistic expression, at least among scholars, that experts were unable to agree on exactly when it originated. After discussing it for decades, they eventually agreed that the new, ninth art was born with modern newspapers in the United States, at the start of the last century.

In just a few years the number of series and characters multiplied and became interlinked. "Comic" or funny at first, they quickly became "serious" and "realistic". Prior to World War II, comic strips were born, bred, reproduced and even looked as if they could die peacefully in the United States. But their story had only just begun.

A story we will explore in this exhibition, by comparing and contrasting. The contrast will enable us to enjoy one of the most intensely creative periods of the 20th century. A glorious explosion now available to us in the form of some of its most representative originals.

In 1895 the United States press established itself as the most innovative in the world. Joseph Pulitzer was competing with William Randolph Hearst to sell more newspapers. Richard Felton Outcault, a talented but still raw illustrator, was working for Pulitzer, who started printing in colour. Pulitzer commissioned Outcault for some picture stories portraying the deprivation and struggle for survival in the most humble neighbourhoods. Thus the Yellow Kid was born, so named because that was the colour of his nightshirt. A sequential story arranged on a page, with a set character and dialogues that would soon be recorded on spherical surfaces marked the new style.

The modern comic was born and the competition between the two editors would give wings and aeroplane engines to the new sequential kids. From the Yellow Kid to Buster Brown, from Buster Brown to the Katzenjammer Kids, and from the Katzenjammer Kids to Little Nemo, to Mutt & Jeff, to Krazy Kat and so on. The list is endless.

SU NOCHE ANGUSTIOSA

UNA AVENTURA DEL INSPECTOR DAN Y STELLA

Pocas horas más tarde, ya al anochecer, Stella y sus dos amigas llegaron a la finca que pensaban habitar durante sus días de descanso.

Ya hemos llegado. Esa es la finca. Tiene un aspecto muy lúgubre, espero que no sea un castillo encantado, lleno de monstruos y apariciones siniestras.

No hace usted justicia a Stella, coronel Higgins. En diversas ocasiones ha pasado noches enteras de angustia. No se preocupen por eso. Lo único importante es que ahora voy a pasarme unas hermosas vacaciones en la costa del Canal. No baje en la vida de Mills, la proclama escotiana. Tengo que arreglar algunos asuntos y por la noche regresare a Scotland Yard. Les deseo que se diviertan mucho y que aprovechen estas vacaciones.

¡Cielos! ¡Oigo pisadas en la escalera! ¡Alguien se está acercando a esta habitación! Pero a los pocos momentos...

¡Cielos! ¡Alguien se está acercando a esta habitación! Pero en aquel momento atravesó el pasadizo que rodea la casa.

¡Maldición! Pero en aquel momento atravesó el pasadizo que rodea la casa.

Me parece que no voy a poder dormir esta noche. Suzy y Gladys no se dan cuenta de la situación. En esta casa se ha cometido un crimen hace poco. Y lo peor es que el criminal debe rondar por aquí todavía.

Mientras mis amigas descansan traté de investigar por mi cuenta. No quisiera asustarlas.

Desgraciadamente, no conozco esta casa y me temo que no obtendré ningún resultado. Pero... ¡qué extraño! Tengo la sensación de que alguien va siguiéndome.

¡Dios mío! Me oí un grito en la habitación de Gladys y al acercarme allí... ¡acaba de asesinarla! ¡Dan de asesinarla! ¡Hacer algo pronto!

¿Qué es lo que ha ocurrido, Stella? Por lo pronto, en la puerta hay una mancha de sangre cuyo origen falta aclarar. Han ocurrido tantas cosas, Dan, que no se como contarlas. Acaba de cometerse un crimen. Pero estando usted aquí ya no hay peligro.

¡Cuidado! Es usted muy optimista, Stella. ¡Ha dicho que estando yo aquí ya no hay peligro!

¡Dios mío! ¡Juraría que este baul no estaba aquí en esta habitación cuando entramos hace un par de horas!

¡Oh! ¿Qué es eso? ¿Alguien se ha escondido en el fondo de este pasillo?

¿Qué ocurre, Stella? Me oí un ruido de pasos y... Hay alguien en la casa. Suzy cree que aquí corremos peligro. Avisa a Gladys.

¡Dios mío! ¡Esta muerte! ¡Murio hace un par de horas, por lo menos. De este hombre debe ser la sangre que hay junto al umbral. Creo que empiezo a ver en este misterio, un pequeño rayo de luz.

El peligro acecha en todos los rincones de esta casa, Dan. Antes de iniciar una investigación me de poner en guardia.

Esta usted pasando una bonita noche de vacaciones, Stella.

No te inquietes, Stella. Esta casa tiene la virtud de alterar los nervios. En este momento hallan las tumbas de más de cincuenta leprosos hace muchos años que se guido su emplazamiento. Pero la gente de estos contornos dice que durante la noche se ven apariciones entre los árboles.

¡Oh! ¡Mi... mira! ¡Socorro!

El inspector Dan al habla. ¿Pero qué dice? ¿Es usted Stella?

¡Dios mío! ¡Socorro!

¡Aah! Esperaba algo semejante. ¡Dios mío!

¡Mal... di... to! BANG

En esta casa están ocurriendo cosas muy extrañas. Inspector Dan acaba de ver una aparición horrible. No estoy sonando, no... Le suplico que venga inmediatamente.

Menos mal. Creo que no llegaría a tiempo. Me de estar cuanto antes junto a Stella. Cuando me ha avisado es que ella y sus compañeras corren un serio peligro. Además hay noticias de que Mortimer y Douglas Renewolt, dos de los más peligrosos delincuentes de Inglaterra andan por aquellos contornos.

¡Volvamos a la siniestra finca del Canal junto al cementerio! Por lo visto Suzy intentando pasar las vacaciones en esta finca. Aquí están ocurriendo cosas demasiado extrañas. En fin, ahora que me he avisado a Dan y hemos asegurado todas las puertas. Creo que lo mejor será intentar dormir.

¡Caramba! ¡Nada menos que Douglas Ernevolt el despiadado asesino! ¡Esta vez tendrás que responder de dos cosas! ¡Buena idea la de ponerte esa horrible máscara!

Pocas horas más tarde, en el departamento de un expreso que regresaba a Londres. ¡Cielos! ¿Qué noche! Después de la muerte de la pobre Gladys no pasaba una hora más en aquella casa aunque me hubiesen dado llaves del primer ministerio. Ernevolt y Mortimer habían atravesado a un hombre a la finca para asesinarlo. Una vez conseguido su propósito, llegaron inmediatamente ustedes tres para poder sacar el cadáver en un baul sin ser descubiertos. Decurrieron a asustarnos para que abandonen la finca. Pero tenían que pasar por el cuarto de Gladys, y como les oí la asesinar. Después de mi llegada perdieron la serenidad y los...

Después de esto todas las vacaciones que tenía me las pasaba leyendo revistas en Scotland Yard. El coronel Higgins nunca más podrá decirle que le falta a usted una noche de terror. Esta ha sido su noche más angustiada, Stella. Pero es más que nada, una detective completa. Gracias, Dan. FIN