“Spain is Different”. Tourism and *apertura* in 1960s Spain

In the early 1960s, a turnaround by the dictatorship of General Franco represented decisive confirmation of the alliance signed with the United States in 1953. The re-establishment of relations between the two countries was consolidated in terms of military and economic assistance, with Spain joining international organisations such as the UN and UNESCO. This was the period of the regime’s so-called diplomatic and economic “*apertura*” (opening), with the most visible effect being the development of tourism as the country’s top industry.

The regime’s change of course took shape in 1962 with the appointment of a new government, in which technocrats and politicians with close ties to Opus Dei replaced soldiers and members of the Falange. The goal was the economic modernisation of the country and *sui generis* parity with the Western democracies. At the same time, 1964 brought the end of an historic cycle with the official celebration of “25 years of peace”, the anniversary of the end of the Spanish Civil War.

Within this context of the creation of a “liberal dictatorship”, it was essential to strengthen the Ministry of Information and Tourism, headed by Manuel Fraga Iribarne until 1969. This was a response to the regime’s interest in creating a link between the country’s largest industry (tourism) and control over information (from the press to the cinema, television and the entertainment world), so that Spain’s image abroad would be appealing to potential tourists and foreign investors. Under the successful slogan “Spain is Different”, promotion of tourism led to a radical change in the customs and the social and visual landscape of the country. However, the many Europeans who visited this place that marketed sun and sea seemed unaware of the true political conditions under which the local population was living. This is underscored in a clip from the film *Jag Är Nyfiken-Gul* (I Am Curious [Yellow]) made by Swiss film-maker Vilgot Sjöman (1924–2006) in 1967. At a time when Nordic tourists were beginning to opt for Spanish beaches, Sjöman approached several of them to ask about the country where they had chosen to spend their holiday, which was still under a dictatorship. In a similar vein, adopting a sociological and critical approach, in 1966 photographer Xavier Miserachs published the photo-book *Costa Brava Show* (1966). It is made up of images that document the new appearance of the area of the northern coast subjected to mass tourism, “the leisure paradise” (as author Manuel Vázquez Montalbán described it). They are laced with humour and a visual irony that resemble that of the Pop aesthetic.

New acquisitions

Xavier Miserachs. Serie *Costa Brava Show*, ca. 1965 / Vintage print
Joan Rabascall. *Naturama*, 1964
Joan Rabascall. *Symphonie inachevée*, 1965
Joan Rabascall. *Women and Naturism*, 1965
Joan Rabascall. *Sin título*, 1966
Joan Rabascall. *Sin título*, 1966
Jaume Xifra. *Composición 06*, 1966
In this context of economic development, within Spain, official critics and managers continued to focus on promoting the country’s culture through pictorial Informalism and tourist photography, convinced of both the political neutrality of abstraction and the profitability of promoting the new optimistic image of Spain. While this promotional strategy was being carried out within the country, in Europe the various opposition groups to the Franco regime got organised, meeting at the 4th Congress of the European Movement, which Francoism pejoratively dubbed the “Munich Conspiracy”. Alongside the presence of renewed dissent abroad, primarily made up of a new generation which had not directly participated in the Civil War, a new group of Catalan artists who had settled in Paris emerged. Joan Rabascall (1935), Jaume Xifra (1934), Benet Rosell (1937) and Antoni Miralda (1942) embarked on lines of work that distanced them from the limitations of painting, working in hybrid environments, from photographic collage and sculptural installations to textual work, the cinema and actions in public spaces. The interest of these artists in modern mythologies enabled them to produce readings associated with the situation in Spain, while the international context of their pieces allowed their work to transcend the spatial and temporal limitations of the Franco dictatorship.

Joan Rabascall, who settled in Paris in 1962, reworked the accounts of the mass media and entertainment capitalism using collage and photography, influenced by Situationism. In the series Spain is Different (1975) he brings together the myths of late Francoist Spain, dominated by consumption, television, new forms of leisure and the promotion of tourism. In his statement “department stores are our museums”, he summarises an entire discourse in response to the impositions of consumer society and its accomplices, the media. In them, he sees mandates which even go so far as to cover aspects of the body, sexuality and the construction of gender. This is shown in the superimposed nudes of Naturama (1964) and Women and Naturism (1965), collages of images from nudist magazines which emphasise the production of desire through the gaze and demonstrate the voyeuristic nature of developed societies flooded with images.

Behind the nature constructed in this type of scenes, which Rabascall ironically sprinkles with white confetti, old coins or ID card photographs, the artist reveals how the ideal of purity and communion with nature found in nudism conceals a hidden commercial image which transforms the human body and desire into merchandise. His work with magazines that were trying to make nudism an accepted phenomenon, something mainstream, anticipated considerations of how the institutionalisation of sexuality and nudity neutralises their potential subversive nature and ability to go against the norm. In this regard, Rabascall explores the new experience of the body produced by tourism and delves into the late-Francoist strategy of using erotic cinema and television in Spain. In doing so, he reveals the reactionary nature of the new customs and moral measures, along with the supposedly liberating images which accompanied them.

**Bibliography**


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**Links**

www.miserachs.com
www.xifra.org