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Forms of Tradition in Contemporary Spain

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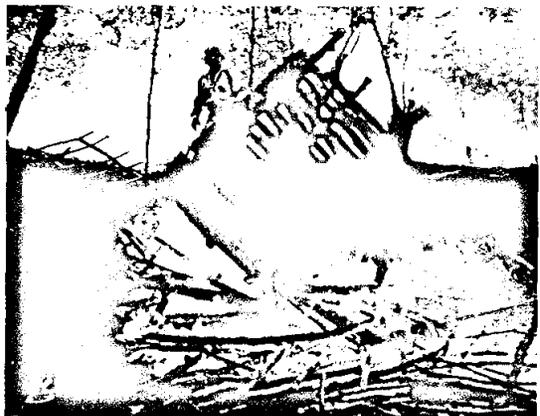
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Epilogue

Now, with a straight new road through the site where the art environment had been, Pujiula still goes down to the spring every morning, and below the road he has built a small tower for visitors to climb after taking a quick swim. Along with refining and enhancing this tower and surrounding passageways, he is also working on a more private creation, a place that contains his mementos and will someday hold his ashes.

It remains to be seen whether this site will be sufficiently accessible to the public to enable Pujiula to engage in the playful yet earnest aesthetic dialogue with his viewers that had become crucial to his work. With phenomenal intensity of effort and purpose as well as an admirable tenacity that allowed him to keep working despite the repeated need to dismantle or demolish components of his work, Pujiula created a special place of his own that he eagerly shared with others. He reveled in the fact that by



Pujiula dismantling the last of the environment with a bonfire, November 5, 2002

inviting visitors into his space, they became part of it—as viewers, inspiration, and cocreators. Given that Pujiula's masterpiece at the Font de Can Sis Rals resulted at least partially from his being energized and inspired by public visitation and response to his work, it is ironic that the same public visitation was used as an excuse to destroy it. Further irony lies in the fact that during the same year in which Spain celebrated the sesquicentennial of the birth of Antoni Gaudí, the work of another Catalan architectural innovator was demolished in the name of progress. ★

Jo Farb Hernández is the director and curator of the Natalie and James Thompson Art Gallery, School of Art and Design, at San José State University, California, and principal of Curatorial and Museum Management Services. Also, she has recently become director of the national organization SPACES: Saving & Preserving Arts & Cultural Environments, based in California.

Editor's Note

This essay was adapted from Jo Farb Hernández, *Forms of Tradition in Contemporary Spain* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi and San José State University, 2005). All rights reserved. The book is the winner of the 2006 Chicago Folklore Prize. For more information, go to www.upress.state.ms.us.

Notes

1 Enric Casasses, "Bulliment del País," *El Mundo* (May 5, 2001).

2 The author conducted a series of interviews with Pujiula during the summers of 2000, 2001, 2002, and 2004. All otherwise unattributed quotations by the artist are the author's translations from interviews in Spanish or from Josep Pujiula i Vila, *L'Home de les Cabanes* (Argelaguer, Spain: self-published, 2001), which was written in Catalan.

3 Pujiula i Vila, op. cit., p. 56.

Additional items purchased with the donations included two burros, two goats, more than a hundred ducks, at least fifteen sacks of oats for the burros, two carts, and a tractor.

Encouraged by public response to the informal tours he spontaneously offered to visitors, and to document his construction activities in the event of future demolition, Pujiula

published this account of his experiences at the park with the help of the group Lluna Plena (Full Moon). The small paperback is replete with anecdotes about his adventures and some of the events and efforts that marked his time at the park. In the book, Pujiula makes it clear that the most important aspect of this project, at least in later years, was his relationship with his visitors.

4 R. Ponsatí, "Josep Pujiula i Vila: L'Home de les Cabanes," *L'Argelaga* 7 (May 2000): 10.

5 Iolanda Batallé Prats, "El Tarzan d'Argelaguer," *Diari de Girona Dominical* (April 22, 2001).

6 Ibid.

7 Casasses, op. cit.

Forms of

he relationship that artists have with their culture is often the first among the many determinants of their aesthetic creations. In most cases, the "sense of place" that infuses an artist's work may be decipherable on a variety of levels, whether the work "mirrors" certain aspects of that culture or, in contrast, is evident primarily in its challenge to them. The relative levels of absorption or disregard are different in each individual, whether one studies artists typically defined as part of the international contemporary mainstream, those more immersed in a traditional society, or those somewhat outside of either.

Forms of Tradition in Contemporary Spain, by Jo Farb Hernández (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi and San José State University, 2005), a groundbreaking study of artists working today in Spain, examines these varying relationships by exploring the myriad influences upon the work of four artists. Significantly different approaches to the creation of their art is revealed, as is the use of and/or investment in it by community members. By including both visual arts and performance events, a broader vision can be engaged beyond that which is bounded by media or genre categories; by studying groups of artists as well as individuals, shared qualities as well as idiosyncratic personal discourse can be evoked.

In addition to Josep Pujiula i Vila, the book profiles a potter, Evelio López Cruz; sculptors David Ventura and Neus Hosta; and performance troupe Les Gàrgoles de Foc.



Evelio López Cruz working on a colled vessel, La Mancha, Spain, 2004

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Tradition in Contemporary Spain

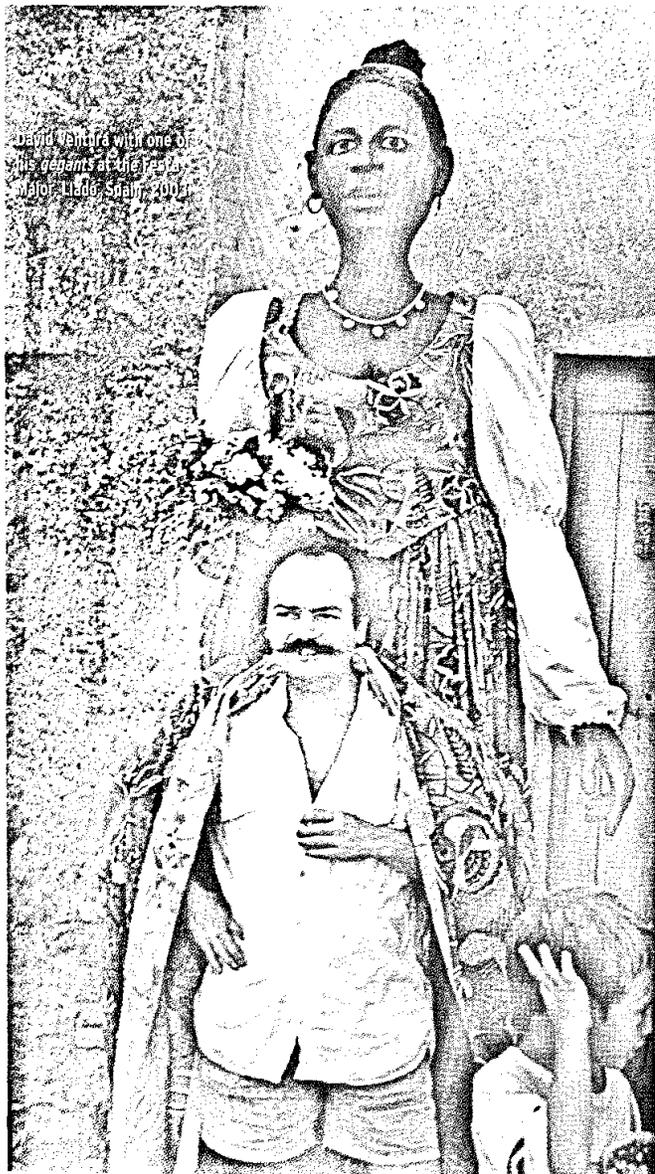
Evelio López Cruz, who learned his craft from his mother, makes unglazed earthenware vessels in an area in La Mancha where ceramics have been made for more than a thousand years, primarily by women. Bucking historically stringent socio-sexual mores to be able to follow his family's tradition, he has little interest in innovation in any aspect of his technology or production. López Cruz digs

his clay by hand, builds his vessels on a pre-Christian-style wheel that does not use centrifugal force for turning, produces only styles of ware that have been locally customary, and fires his kiln with wood. Grounded in the creation of modest objects inspired by and responsive to the needs of daily life as they have been manifested for generations, he is proactively and unswervingly dedicated to preserving the time-honored aspects of his ancestral lifestyle and artistic production.

David Ventura and Neus Hosta are *cartoners*, or sculptors in press-molded paper, who construct monumental *gegants* (figures) and *capgrossos* (heads) for use in public festivals and processions. They learned their craft through oral transmission and self-teaching, and they produce traditional images that respond to community standards within the framework of rituals and festivals as well as innovative aesthetic variants that nevertheless remain linked to Catalan tradition. Function is important to the artists—the heads and figures must be light enough to be worn and danced in the streets—but they are also able to be inventive and concentrate fully on aesthetic and expressive value. Folktales, legends, and myths vie with images from contemporary culture or local events to enliven performance events with their expressive and eloquent creations.

Les Gargoles de Foc, a group of masked folk street-theater performers, lead *correfocs*, night processions whose now widely known forms retain relics of pre-Christian cults as well as later medieval elements sanctioned by the Catholic Church as it incorporated them into its own ritual framework. These “devils,” dressed in homemade costumes and masks, waving wands with elaborate pyrotechnics and accompanied by a fire-spitting “dragon” float, simulate the misrule of satanic disorder, pitting Evil against Good as they fleetingly capture and reign over Catalan villages. Les Gargoles at once continue a tradition and creatively adapt it with innovative theatrical elements and technological advances. The flow of the procession is primal and visceral; the elements combine to create an immense—albeit fluid—work of art that can be neither completed nor consumed without community involvement.

DVDs of each of the featured artists have been produced. For information, contact Jo Farb Hernández at Natalie and James Thompson Art Gallery, School of Art and Design, San José State University, San Jose, CA 95192-0089; 408/924-4328; or jfh@cruzio.com.



David Ventura with one of his gegants at Festa Major, Banyoles, Spain, 2001

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Participants dancing with devils from Les Gargoles de Foc, Festa Major, Banyoles, Spain 2003