

STREET ARTS IN SPAIN BETWEEN TRADITION AND INNOVATION

Toni Gonzalez
International arts consultant

A history of authoritarianisms

Situated in the South of Europe Spain is well known by its climatology, sunny days, beaches and Fiestas. Also the tradition, shared by the Mediterranean countries and others in the world that enjoy a warm weather, to establish relationships among people in the public spaces, streets, squares, bars, etc. In Spain the strong historic influence of the Catholic religion fostered the religious rituals in the streets, processions, ceremonial dances and annuals popular gatherings in the streets such as the patron saint Fiestas Mayores. Moreover, because an history of authoritarianisms and hierarchies the society reacted using the public space for the rebellion introducing new forms of artistic expressions in the public spaces in order to communicate the necessary ideas of social changes.

With the streets and the public space as a central point of the social relationships, the contributions of the artists were strong enough to develop styles and specific artistic languages different and indicatives of a social and political reality. These traditional artistic manifestations were developing for years and are basic components of the Spanish singularity.

The popular artistic styles and languages developed in Spain had to deal with a festive explosion of enjoyment resulted of a daily life of oppression and lack of democracy. Dances, comedy, clowns, physical and theatrical manifestations are related to the happiness of living and the pleasures of the body more than intellectual or abstract ideas. The artistic Spanish popular expressions have to deal more in living the moment than in any consideration about the way of living and feel.

Democracy and expressing freedom

Democracy and European integration arrived at the last quarter of the last century and new possibilities to open the artistic expression were developed. Spaces in the street were liberated and the more compromised artist decided to work in the streets directly to the audiences.

The remains of the Catholic culture were disappearing and the public space was opened and secularized. New street arts companies and festivals appeared and parallel to the traditional artistic manifestation new contemporary visions of the arts were created in public spaces. The theatre company Comediants could be the paradigm of the renovated tradition as La Fura dels Baus the archetype of a new way of expression. Festivals as Tàrrrega were born as an evolution of the old traditional Fiestas Mayores.

New trends in Street Arts in Spain

After 25 years of democracy innovation and risk are not big issues in the landscape of the street arts in Spain. As before, entertainment and tradition are the main focus for the artistic creation in the street. Few are the groups or artists that remains searching new ways for the artistic expression in the public space and few the festivals that understand that they should be a showcase of the news and young energetic artist who arrive with the idea to shake the bases of the cultural Spanish order.

There are still companies looking for new ways to develop Spanish traditions in a more contemporary way. All of them with the distinctive stroke of joyful and the pleasure for life. Xarxa Teatre (the only big scale producers), Comediants (still on) or El Espejo Negro (that satirize with puppets the stereotypes of the Andalusian life and their characters) are some good examples.

The last years renovation have come from contemporary dancers and choreographers; an strong a creative group in Spain that realising the lack of attention of institutions and public in indoor theatres decided to show their works directly to the public in the street. Senza Tempo, Sol Pico, Provisional Danza are examples of these indoor dance group that not only moved their choreographies to the streets but investigate the space and the proximity with the public.

New and atypical spaces are developed by the Sevillian company la Imperdible, machines and peculiar mobile elements are made by Discipulos de Morales, Sarruga or Hortzmuga, and new applications of common tools are developed by the La Viuda – Sol Picó.

Playing with fire and fireworks has been and will be one of the main constituents of the Spanish spectacular shows. Groups from Valencia region are specialist and developers of these techniques that in its pyrotechnic aspects has developed considerably but the dramaturgy and theatricality has remained the same for years; the same myths and archetypes.

The unknown Latin America

This description could be also made when talking about the Latin America reality of the street arts. They are very strong and alive but so different in aesthetics and style from the European that there is no sense to make any comparison. In Colombia, Mexico, Brazil, Argentina or Chilli exists a similar history than in Spain about social relationships and artistic creation in the streets. Traditions developed to street arts in the 60s and 70s and exist from then with not many changes but with a colourful power totally unknown in Europe and worthy to be discovered.