

# UNA PIETRA SOPRA

*'A creator must be as hard as a stone and as delicate as a flower'*

Bigas Luna <sup>1</sup>

*'I think of my studio as a garden, the things in it follow their natural course. They grow, they ripen... as they ripen in my spirit. Je travaille comme un jardinier'*

Joan Miró

Visiting his world without him in it, feeling the earth beneath your feet, imagining his presence and making the link between nature and his places of work, his studio in Salamó as well as the workspaces at El Virgili, his place in Camp de Tarragona, or even imagining the walks along the beach where he picked up objects returned by the sea...

*In autumn I like walking along the beach with my dog Pirata... I stroll along and pick up fragments of civilization that have ended up in the sea due to human irresponsibility and which the waves return remodelled, with new shapes, more graceful and poetic.*

I have looked for all these points of shared experience to hold on to. What made the deepest impression on me was finding the tables in the garden with film scripts tied together and held down by stones. 'The answer to everything is in the garden' said Bigas Luna, but we also have his house with its palm trees, like Miró who thought of his studio as a garden.

This life, which changes as it advances, stores up words, dialogues and characters all subject to the passing of time after they have served their function, but they are also the

proof that time solidifies like a structure and now gives us a chance to discover new angles from which to view things. We see how words take a back seat to prioritise the image while always being a whole body that synthesises his creative approach and, in the end, what is projected is a potent image of synthesis to express his world, as happens in certain scenes from his films where words are often unnecessary.

Bigas Luna's cinema prioritises the visual image and we can find in it parallels with his entire creative output which, in a transversal manner, greet us in any *mise-en-scène*. Any creative situation is of interest when we forget we are making films for film buffs, painting for consumers of art works, or writing literature for readers of novels, when what we do goes beyond the pigeonhole it is put in, perhaps as when Calvino tells us in *Una pietra sopra* <sup>2</sup> (The Uses of Literature) that the interest in a literary situation starts when we write novels for people who do not read novels.

I have not been able to distance myself from the title Calvino used when he published (from a distance in time and space) a collection of his writings to show what point they were at and to cap them with a stone.

<sup>1</sup> Jordi Mollà, "Preface: Bigas, el rey mago de Occidente", from *Bigas Luna. Sombras de Bigas, luces de Luna* by Isabel Pisano. Madrid, Fundación Autor (SGAE), 2001.

<sup>2</sup> Italo Calvino, *Una pietra sopra*. (The Uses of Literature) Turin, Giulio Einaudi Editore, 1980.

Luis mira desde la puerta. Ana esta sorprendida del atrevimiento de Coco. Sacan con mucho cuidado el collar de Coco y lo dejan sobre la mesa. Coco dice algo al oido de Ana, que intrigada se rie. Coco va hacia el tocador y recoge algo que pone en su bolsillo. son invitaciones del desfile < gadget "canalizador Cheva Guskan">.

36. INT. EXT. CALLE EN PARIS. DIA.

Vemos entre el tráfico, una enorme limousine. Dentro los chicos rodeados de paquetes. Ana se esta poniendo una blusa que han comprado. Ana le dice al go al oido. Da instrucciones para que pare. Ana con complicitad se ríen y bajan de la limousine. Luis están sorprendidos esperando. Vemos a Ana y a Luis haciendo pis de pie frente a un muro lleno de graffitis. lo estan haciendo con el "canalizador Cheva-Guskan" que les permite hacerlo de pie. Luis y Mario se miran sorprendidos, bajan mirando a las chicas y se ponen a mear a su lado. a los cuatro les coge un momento de risa. el chofer esta alucinado.

37. INT. RESTAURANTE JAPONÉS. NOCHE.

Dentro personajes cantando en un restaurante. Música fuerte «Cha Cha Cha D'Amour». «Ultra Lounge». No los oímos. Shusi pasa por una cinta transp. eligen las piezas que más les gustan. cantan las piezas que van sa. Ana lleva puesto el vestido de Coco y Coco, el de Ana. Charlan. camarero deja en su mesa dos platos enormes. el aspecto fállico de este marisco. reir estrepitosamente. un cuchillo. marisco al ritmo de la canción. las risas cantan.

38. EXT. HOTEL PLAZA PARIS. DIA. 38

Also the first cover illustration for Invisible Cities was a reproduction of a painting by Magritte, going back to a stone, which, in this case was floating, suggesting unity between apparently opposite poles; consistency and fragility. Floating stones and bodies, like the canvas covers hanging in the studio, were for Bigas Luna a way of balancing fragility with hardness, while also showing the respect the writer had for fragile material in his own work. There are many ways to survive time and interpretation, but also to be transmuted as happens with the paper of the scripts that continue their process towards volume and the art work, impregnated with the natural elements like the canvas covers used in the garden... I do not know if they knew each other, but they could have shared many a meal with Bigas as host. For us there now appear two major aspects of his work; process as an essential tool, and the necessity of sharing, establishing complicity, not just with humans, as in the actors in his films, but with nature, with the earth and animals.

*Nature has become my greatest collaborator. The excitement of walking, of seeing textures in the earth, of sudden, unthinkable compositions, irregular and perfect that only nature could produce. (...) Changes in the weather, moods, are magic circles which I have become used to working with.*

This is why I have decided to begin with this connection between the scripts and the canvas covers. While the volume is formed by a body created by what is closed within it, the material becomes an open creative body that houses the external accident to incorporate the work. And yes, my common theme is stone, the stones that he placed on the scripts tied with string that he left in the garden and the canvas covers he stretched over the fields, free from the passing of time. Jordi Mollà, an actor who worked with him, remembers hearing his description of what a creator should be like, 'hard as a stone and as delicate as a flower'. As simple as returning to look at those scripts petrifying under a stone. Before

they do, however, the paper will have to perform an act of both resistance to and collusion with nature.

### **Sediments of feelings in transit...**

Rain, sun, wind, animals... From the passing of time and accidents that are incorporated into the traces that transform the texture and contain a dialogue in which chance has played a part. For me, the motivation is not only getting to know his work but finding in his approach the lucidity to understand the reach of the work beyond everything that is contained in the history of art as we have been taught it. Thresholds that allow different languages to be united and the continual championing of the importance of the process.

*I prefer projects to finished works, sketches to finished drawings.*

Calvino said that we function as a 'mental cinema' which never stops projecting images onto our interior vision. The process, images that come from different visual, written, and oral contexts are filtered through creative projects but also the unconscious. The project is all that which filters through different mental processes, but also generates itself in the creative process. In the case of Bigas Luna there is the added interest in the connections produced between the individual and the objects that surround him, as Eduard Olivella remembers when he worked as a photographer on the films from his *Iberian Trilogy*.

Thinking about the notebooks where he set down feelings -rough and simple notes- or the pages of scripts, we also arrive at *Anfang*, the return to the beginning, where he selects some of the words from the contents as titles for his pieces.

*I discovered the word in the book La razón fronteriza by Eugenio Trias, one of my favourite books. I liked the word and I wrote it down in one of my notes. The coincidence of the Catalan word 'fang', meaning 'mud', as an element of commencement and a symbol of origin, also caught my attention.*



Movement is life itself and he always rebelled against being pinned down. The work, devoid of cause and effect, without lineal direction, becomes a web that links 'different times and temperatures' such as materials and the developed images that never stop revealing to us the many others hidden below. For the presentation in Florence of *Il sesso di segni* in 1996 Gabriele Perretta sited the artist in a context where everything that moves becomes the sum of written as well as audio-visual culture, demonstrating that the separation between the two universes 'has never existed'.

*... I use scripts as the basis for design, I substitute the blank page for writing and then I draw – symbols, figures; I place it all within old frames that provide contrast and become, from that moment on, part of the work.*

The image is a street in movement or a garden for meeting life in silence, because art and painting come from this continual movement that causes the desire to live, the positive force, our drives. Discovering living signs, creating and giving energy.

*It is a street rich in sensuality and passion, a way of knowing life. (...) Many registers depend on the state of necessity that is created during research into new forms of communication. To create is a little like stripping off in order to put new clothes on. All creation is an experience in constant contact with everything around it; it positions man in a positive phase... Llavors (Seeds) (2004), done with earth and ink, are part of my fascination for the life force (...). For some time now they have appeared in my drawings and it is now in the garden where they take on the most meaning.*

The support papers are exposed once again to the elements when he leaves them under a fig tree in the courtyard at El Virgili in Tarragona, to be later worked on in his *Lactatio* series. He did the first ones in Italy with the name *allattatrici*, characters chosen from his personal mythology, but he soon discovered various medieval icons in his own country

and an especial weakness for those Virgins in the cloister of Tarragona cathedral...

*... In my opinion it is the most sensual, joyful and Mediterranean Virgin I have ever seen.*

The connection between mother's milk and lactation also appears in his cinema, as we can see in some of the videos from the series *Las Comedias Bárbaras* (The Brutish Comedies) (2003) – *Allattatrices*, *Allattatore*, *Mamador Molar* and *Virgen Lactatio* – presented within the context of one of his large multidisciplinary projects, dedicated to the work of Valle-Inclán. We can find in his drawings the recurring image of a woman with milk squirting from her breast into the sea. When he was small he had an illness which meant that milk was the only food he could tolerate. His aunt Paulina as well as his mother (the nexus appears at random from my memories of Bigas) would open his mouth and make him drink it from a *porró*, or long-spouted drinking bottle, something he baulked at. Also as a child he had his first experience of the combination of satisfaction and disappointment when his belief that women's breasts were full of milk was destroyed.

*(...) women always appear offering their milk: sometimes they offer it to the Mediterranean Sea; other times they shoot it to the sky, or give it to people in need; we can even find them drinking milk from their own breasts.*

The first are from 1995, presented in the Santo Ficara gallery in Florence; the next year at the Sergio Sargentini gallery in Rome, with an act by an *allattatore*, a man with milk coming out of his penis, or the performance at the Giulia gallery in Rome where, every day at the same time for a week, seven real *allattatrice* revealed their breasts and squeezed them until streams of milk came out.

### Joining together desires: a present with a future

He drew a lot because drawings can be done at home or while travelling by train. The notes, day to day jottings, are a way of bring-

ing together desires, perhaps because he sees them as 'the only thing that is present and always has a future'. This is how these notes were conceived which always mix words 'referencing essential things or things that are wished for or cannot be forgotten'. He began joining them together as a support on which he would later paint and, little by little, without forgetting the need for his art being portable, taped them together with artist's tape...

*The idea arose from the need to have working surfaces larger than those I used for the Cares de l'ànima [Faces of the Spirit] series, but at the same time I had to find a way of travelling and easily transporting these larger format works. Because of my work, all the artworks I produce have to be able to travel and to be folded and unfolded easily at home and in hotel rooms.*

Via gesture we arrive at a single space trapped in the multiplicity of its faces, a collage of stories strung between reality and imagination. The confluence of a whole: reason, drive, idea, form, symbol... and the 'irreplaceable vehicle' Perejaume saw in 1989 that 'allowed travel around a contemporary world with so many abrupt frontiers'<sup>3</sup>. Gesture, the fragment that -between a multitude of lost gestures- structures a line, a creative process that will finally find a place in the permanent transit of the extensive secret line of every creator.

Drawing over the pages of scripts or pages with notes is a form of recycling what for him signified desire, continuity transformation..., life does not check the flow of things and provides the possibility of living, of opening up other possibilities when everything seems to have been overcome by its own functions. It is energy that advances and is transformed in every material, the signs

and symbols that can be an eye as well as the female sex, that may refer to a first as well as a last look at the world, simultaneously both its beginning and end.

*I am not interested in the mystical truth, but I am interested in the mystery and force of certain figures... I keep a lot of old scripts and pages with notes; I like to use them as the support for my drawings. The mixing of what I write with what I paint pleases me. The fact that my writings form part of my artworks makes me feel as if I were always painting, which is what I enjoy doing most. In this way I present my life and my work as the background of my drawings.*

Does he approach filmmaking in a painterly way?

*Filmmaking is my medium and my way of painting.*

He liked to call himself a 'creator of time' and his interpretations constitute a veritable assemblage inhabited by contradictions, the different narrative rhythms that provide visibility in this extraordinary cross fertilisation of painting, film, photography, writing, science, technology... Bigas Luna was interested in the alchemy of thoughts, things and events, a sense of -according to Rotelli- a determination to search for other languages.

*The 'life' of things interests me, the energy that interacts between opposites and paradoxical situations. I believe in a certain alchemy that places it above a communicative quality, the work in the world, creating a set of interchanges, of independence between dimensions considered opposed.*

### **The marks of duality**

Day does not exist without night. Nothing exists without its opposite, because everything functions in a binary way. When Calvino writes about the values to be preserved for the next mil-

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<sup>3</sup> Perejaume, *Ludwig Jujol*. Barcelona, Edicions de la Magrana, 1989.

lennium, he always starts from oppositions, twin concepts that act as copulas to help us see the world in a different way and not as a society that sets terms against each other without realising that each one progresses from the sum. He is, like Bigas Luna, in a street in movement that makes art an existential function of the search for lightness as a reaction to the weightiness of living, however, 'we cannot admire the lightness of language if we do not admire language endowed with weightiness'<sup>4</sup>. Speed cannot exist without slowness; lightness needs the gravid hardness of a stone, as in the phrase remembered by Mollà combining hardness (stone) and delicateness (flower), just like the impossibility of comprehending strength without fragility.

How else would the Bigas and the Luna surface in paintings such as those from the series *Cares de l'ànima* [Faces of the Spirit] (1999-2004), where he manages to synchronise his dark side with his lighter one, or in videos such as *Collar de moscas* [Fly Necklace] (2002) which, according to him, is the best example of the very different worlds closest to his wish to integrate film, photography and painting?

*The act of drawing brings to my mind certain symbols that I repeat compulsively for months until they vanish in the same way they appeared. The faces of the spirit arrive in my life at the moment the symbols for the spirit and reason, which have always been opposing, fuse together repeatedly in my mind, to later disappear. The first ones I did were small splashes of Chinese ink in which a face would be subtly insinuated. I began to elaborate on them, including them in letters I sent to friends or notes I sent to actors during filming. Later, I stuck on leaves and things I found on my walks in the country or at the beach. Finally, the combination of these faces resulted in a good alchemy. This was how my compulsion for the faces of the spirit started.*

The inescapable urge to paint, because painting makes him feel good and is the path that strengthens his interior life. He believed

in the existence of the spirit and with these drawings he wanted to represent graphically his own personal vision of the spiritual world...

*Almost all of them were done at night, in an atmosphere of ceremony that I myself bring about when I start the process of creation. Preparing for the Faces of the Spirit is very much a ritual, a form*



4 Calvino, Italo. *Lliçons americanes* Six Memos for the Next Milenium). Barcelona, Edicions 62, 2000.

5 Bigas Luna, El Virgili, 9 September 2002.

*of meditation that always follows a procedure. First I carefully prepare all the bits and pieces: leaves from trees, painter's tape, twigs, inks and water. These pictures are always done in groups of biblical numbers: in threes, sevens, twelves... Secondly, I position the bits of vegetation on the paper, then I shape the outline of the face and later I add the eyes and mouth. Finally, I leave the faces in the exact same spot they were done*

*until the following day. In the morning I examine them; I gather them up and store them carefully in a drawer<sup>5</sup>.*

Even in his own name, comprising of the two families of the Bigas and the Lunas, are mixed two different, contrasting worlds, which often appear related in his films. If we read his conversations with Lucus Soler,



sharing stories over the dining table, which he so enjoyed, we can go deeper into the experience of freedom that occurs when uniting the countryside with technology, and discover that when he painted he needed solitude and in films he combined, as tragedy and humour are combined in his output, words and images, reason and dreams, reality and fiction, history and current events, arts such as painting and photography, the Italian neorealist look with media kitsch... He himself tells us how these contrasts fascinated him and he always used them.

*I have always been marked by duality (...) They are two different, very contrasting worlds; black and white.*

If we go further back in time, we can find in his early work a need to duplicate almost identical objects (tables, chairs...). At that time Ramon Espelt signalled 'dualism as a basic constitutive element of his work and personality. Bigas Luna's cinematic narrations move forward due to the tension arising from two antithetic poles between which his protagonists are obliged to act. Reality and desire (*Bilbao*, 1978), nature and culture (*Caniche*, 1979), religion as an experience and religion as speculation (*Reborn*, 1981), North and South as different cultures (*Lola*, 1986), fiction and reality (*Angustia*, 1987), the *normal* and *wild* sides of sex (*Las edades de Lulú*, 1990), or the two sides of the Spanish male alluded to in the title *Jamón, jamón* (1992)'<sup>7</sup>.

### The work within a work

*In an art gallery a man is looking at a painting of a cityscape, and the cityscape opens up to embrace the gallery that contains it and the man who is looking at it.*

Italo Calvino

The picture within a picture by Robert Doisneau that so fascinated Bigas Luna and the dilation of limits, as in Calvino's invisible city which -joined by Poe's protagonist - conjures up a container where opposing el-

ements coexist indefinitely, the metaphor of a box where all the future Berenices are present at the same time, entangled, mixed up and hidden<sup>8</sup>. He who is just with he who is unjust, the narration within a narration, the city within a city, the work within a work...

While he was location scouting for the film *Son de Mar* (2000-2001), he wrote a note on a street in Dènia 'as a reminder of one of Manuel Vicent's well-known characters' that was to become the face of the spirit of his *Microcosmos* project, held by the SGAE and the *Fundació Autor a Catalunya* in the Metropolitana gallery in Barcelona in 2001. Another journey into his inner self, asking himself the same questions as scientists do about the origin and mystery of the universe.

*One day I was experimenting with a scanner and a computer. I divided up a face and enlarged one part to over two metres. I made gigantic murals from a drawing that took up no more than half a centimetre and discovered a microcosm within a microcosm and the inverse...*

Each fragment was a discovery of how each part is a reflection of the whole, a process of sounding that unites the inside with the outside and lines emerging from the ambiguity to be interpreted. Each piece of material expresses the universe, as Eugenio Trias explained when reflecting on the points of life that Bigas Luna extracts from a face, 'masks of the spirit, in the supposition (after Leibniz, who Bigas and I both admire) that everything is chock-full of souls, or potential spirits', giving 'expression and voice to these latent micro-worlds'<sup>9</sup>. An exploration that allows us to look into ourselves using minute fragments (a tiny piece of brain or a tear) with a world of suggestions, such as the eye that Isabel Pisano saw as 'an upside-down erupting volcano' or 'a maternal breast of uncertain shape without the mouth of a new-born baby'<sup>10</sup>.

In 2002 at the Bitforms gallery in New York this project became a new generator of stories that encouraged intervention from

6 Lucas Soler. *3 paellas con Bigas Luna*. Valencia, Fundació Municipal de Cine, Mostra de València, 2002.

7 Ramon Espelt. *Mirada al món de Bigas Luna*. Barcelona, Laertes, S.A., 1980; "Bigas y Luna", from *Bigas y Luna*, Gijón, 30 Edición Festival Internacional de Cine.

8 Glòria Bosch. *Citando a Calvino*. Vic, Abril Editorial, 1993.

9 Eugenio Trias. "Microcosmos", Barcelona, SGAE and Galeria Metropolitana, 2001.

10 Isabel Pisano, *Bigas Luna, sombras de Bigas, luces de Luna*. Madrid, Fundación Autor, 2001.

the public. Anyone could go online and choose one of the drawings from the series, select a fragment of it, enlarge it as much as they liked and then print it out. This open process of creation in producing a work became the most important thing...

*It is my life. The best thing in all my work is the energy it generates, the thrill, the desire to create something. The energy the creative act produces and the energy given off by a work when viewed by someone capable of absorbing it.*<sup>11</sup>

### Generator of stories

In fact the covers and the scripts we found in the garden are simply a variant on his approach to life and creation. The creative process is once again central and is identified as a generator of stories, of works that are created with the participation of others. What does his work consist of? He himself explained it as knowing how to listen and knowing how to tell stories.

When he was 20 painting began to be important. He visited the studios of Robert Llimós, Arranz Bravo and Bartolozzi, he took drawing classes at the Baixas school... but his artistic training left theory behind at the end of the 1960's when he explored conceptual art. At first with artist friends from his generation (Angel Jové, Silvia Gubern, Muntadas and Miralda), interested in video art and installations; later on his trips to Italy and London. This early period showed a concern for concepts, small-scale digital formats and a desire to experiment.

*For me the discovery of the world of art and creation was a time of joy, pleasure and energy. The world is heading towards a simulacrum of seriousness that does it no good. We should approach art and knowledge from a playful, less serious perspective, something which was done at the beginning and should be reinstated. As a Chinese philosopher once said, you must rid yourself of seriousness.*

In fact, from the broken tables he designed when he shared the *Estudi gris* [Grey Studio] with Carles Ricart to the nine broken

tables in his first solo exhibition in the Vinçon gallery in 1973, Espelt reflected not only on functional negation and distortion of appearances, by use of plastic imitating marble, but on the fact of anticipating a way of questioning the audience of the provocative action of Els Comediants, which was also applicable to some films. Ràfols Casamada observed at the time how 'the objects on display are masked by the action, the actors do not allow, or make psychologically difficult, concentrated attention on the objects. This, naturally, creates a sense of unease in the viewer'<sup>12</sup>. His broken table in homage to Duchamp purchased by Dalí and on show in the Mae West room of the Dalí Museum in Figueres is from this period, as well as video montages such as *Cadires* [Chairs] (1974).

It may seem a stretch to go from here to his dinners in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, but this time I want to transform the table that he so often shared in one way or another -with connotations that are different from those of his early work- and, as the residue of a whole experience of life, position it in a place that allows us to consume our visual Bigas Luna with a mix of personal elements that lead us into his world. When we look at his filmmaking, the people he worked with had to be the same ones he could share a meal with, so it comes as no surprise that his favourite line from the history of cinema was, *Mangia mangia que ti farà bene*.

*Around a table there should be a maximum of 12 people and if it is for a celebration, there should be one side with no one sitting there, facing the brightest area or the most representative part of the place or room. This arrangement, as in the Last Supper, allows the food to be easily seen, it is more comfortable for the person who is the host and for the person serving the food.*

To revise rituals and symbols to do with food so as to 'enhance the sensuality that the act of eating can bring', but also to sit with diners at a table and, as a ritual, recount stories. In his project *Ingestum* (2008) three essential fluids converge: blood (motor of life),

<sup>11</sup> Interview with Àngel Harguindey. Valencia, Cuadernos del IVAM, 2007.

<sup>12</sup> Albert Ràfols Casamada, op. cit., p7.

milk (virgin lactation) and water (remedy). To look for this harmony via the senses and return to the origin of the human being, to a fusion connected with the words of Luca Beatrice on the desire to ‘cancel the collision course between nature and culture’<sup>13</sup>.

All the symbols he uses are a reflection of this return to the land: breastfeeding and eroticism, setting up the ritual of eating, eating with all the senses and digesting. His entire philosophy is synthesised in *Ingestum*, with food as one of the central elements of Mediterranean culture, but always as a process of learning about these origins that connect us with the land. Among his rituals, food as the symbol that unites us all around a table, as in the supper for 12 people where he introduces a poetic that includes biological products made by artisans and local producers as well as the cultural characteristics of a place. For him, lovers of the land are always ‘bioneers’...

*Ingestum appeared in my life thanks to a series of meetings, discoveries and reflections that revealed in me a desire to return to the land, our origins, a respect for our food and those who care for it. (...) a work in progress that aims to show the energy of a project and inspire other works where boundaries disappear and art, science, biology, medicine and gastronomy unite, mix and cross fertilise.*

### Art can and must be in everything

Live to tear down limits, to mix everything and so that art ‘can and must be in everything’: the land, what is valid from the past, roots and the return to origins, new technologies, biology... in a process that is nothing more than life itself.

*Reviving traditions is essential; preserving those that work interests me. (...) New technology interests me greatly and I believe it is greatly improving the work of man, but I believe it is also fundamental to return to the land.*

An example of interdisciplinary work that supports this idea is the series *Els Ninots* [The Dolls] (2007), another transforma-

tion in his work that started as sketches for ideas, original drawings, treated with digital printing techniques – as he had done with the 2004 series *Llavors* [Seeds] – but with a further mutation added the moment they became characters in his films. There is always this sense of work in progress, the energy that every project generates and which, when it seems spent, continues its transit.

The reading of any work is incomplete or limited if we fail to understand the unitary process of the work, the confluence of painter, draughtsman, designer, photographer, sculptor, writer, collector, filmmaker... *The plurality and confluence of different elements favours strange alchemies. (...) it is an artistic and human experience. (...) There is a tendency to value the result, the price and the opinion of the audience, but without doubt the most important thing about a work is the process of its making.*

In the words of Roberta Bosco, ‘a place to think, create, to live’<sup>14</sup> was made in the two poultry sheds which were converted into creative spaces in collaboration with Pere Soldevila<sup>15</sup>, who had been at his side since 1997. Under the name *Bioners* all kinds of cultural activities were promoted with the aim of finding a balance between the use of technology, the immediacy of communication, and the isolation produced by a hidden-away place where nature, art and energy are combined.

*Bioners has no structure, no rules, nor even any strategy. It is a question of energy, of a mix of creative, cultural and didactic energy with great potential for fun...*

### Touching the image, testing life

The early photographic exhibitions, such as *200 Polaroid* in the Vinçon gallery in 1976, came out of the conceptual world and domestic technology. With this system he caught the moment and was able to ‘touch’ the images, feel attraction for ‘the energy interleaved between opposites and paradoxical situations’, but especially the direct relation

13 Luca Beatrice. “El sabor de la luna”, from *Bigas Luna. Ninots*. Turin, Marena Rooms Gallery Contemporary Art, 2009.

14 Roberta Bosco. *Bigas Luna + Paolo Maggis. Bioners*.

Carlo Cambi Editore, 2012.

15 Pere Soldevila, op. cit, p14.

that produces the desire to touch...

*I have always wanted to 'touch' images (...). In a certain sense it means 'testing' life again, its possible depth, its force. (...) When I worked as a designer and painter I could touch what I made. When I started working in film, 'I could not touch my films' and my fetishist instinct and my love for objects felt abandoned. Photography has been my salvation, it has given me everything I needed. A marvellous therapy that allows me to fix time and spaces, look at them, touch them. An indispensable complement to my work.*

The repetition of thought, fixing a moment from time and joining together different instants is the origin of cinema and takes him closer to the telling of a story.

*My photographs were born of deep compulsions. I take them when I am preparing and shooting a film, I never need a particular reason to take them, I have never made an effort to look for a photo; they come to me, and when that happens it is wonderful. I grab my camera, which is always ready, I stop everything, I squat down, I get up, I crouch down again and never stop shooting in all directions. (...) later my studio is filled with these photographs, which are not ready until I mount them and they are on a single support. This mounting and selection of each photograph is another magic moment: I touch, stick, compare, unstick, view, change, play with the distortions that occur between each photo and which I often deliberately cause, with the changes in light, which especially interest me for their role as witness to the time that has elapsed between each picture.*

He is interested in the tiny differences in a brief space of time, the distortions, changes in light, the anecdote, the memory, the tensions, the confrontations... For Rotelli, all these images are 'a constellation of differences'<sup>16</sup>.

*In the Monegros, location scouting, after taking one of those panoramic vistas, I was drawn to a small stone at my feet and going from a general shot to close-up it was an exciting and magical vision. I started to shoot with my camera all the details of the ground at my feet.*

These photographs that go from a general shot to a close-up, remind us of what he did later starting with *Cares de l'ànima* and with the *Microcosmos* project. From a panoramic view he goes to a writing system of images that borders once again on collage, to the constant integration of an indivisible whole. The series of slides taken in 1964 and manipulated by him in 2012, *A fior di pelle*, becomes a synthesis of this transformation of the character in a scene in transit where the difference is marked by the passing of time.

### **The changing limits of the body and the mind**

An interesting experience that influenced his painting took place in 1968 with the psychiatrist Josep Lluís Fabregas. It was a revolutionary idea for the time; a department for healing the mentally ill by using art. His role consisted of teaching drawing and helping patients produce artworks, material that would then be used to analyse their mental problems. There he discovered many hidden things that emerge clearly in drawings, and the corroboration of the idea that a mentally ill person, so brilliant from a creative point of view, when cured is not able to produce with the same energy...

*One of them was that what you do with your hands, when you draw or paint, is ahead of your thinking. I mean that the expressive capacity of an artist is ahead of the intellectual process of elaboration. This is why many artists first discover their theories in their own art.*

It should be pointed out, however, that the surroundings did not help at all, and that when patients returned home they wanted to be back in the hospital, and they were warned not to treat them so well because later it would be worse. There is often a tendency to associate a project that is revolutionary for its time with madness, but always, over time, things are revealed in the end and the reasons for the attack become apparent: discomfort and fierce preservation of everything at stake and, ultimately,

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<sup>16</sup> Rotelli, Nereo. "Creare è una cerimonia simile allo strip-tease" and "Tre domande a Gabriele Perretta partire da *Bigas Luna*", from *Bigas Luna a Firenze. Il sesso dei segni*. Florence, Santo Ficara, 1996.

corrupt interests (ideas, power, economics...). The always restrictive determining elements that are far removed from the quote by Zuloaga that Bigas Luna liked so much, 'dare to do anything and go mad for everything'.

*(...) if you paint in an automatic or intuitive way, later you will not only understand it, but you will understand yourself through painting.*

And the negative metaphors return which inject us with a divided society devoid of the ability to generate the recognition of our inner completeness. Instead of searching for a balance between the body and the mind, they are separated, and this is as applicable to illness as it is to other aspects of life where it is imperative that the gaze produces creative experience. Far from this world that hems us in with limiting screens that provoke confrontation instead of opening ways of sharing concepts, that sicken the body and the mind, we have to scour the boundaries for maximum energy.

Perhaps still, often, as Siri Hustvedt says, we hear comments that make us feel inheritors of the encyclopaedist Illustration and this is as applicable to the art world as it is to history, society or politics. The thing is to realise, as she sees it, that there is not a single parameter common to all for research and, when observing the world of Goya, she sees clearly that the represented historical facts do not explain what is, because 'the essential element in all history is movement and change'<sup>17</sup>. It is not easy to break with a genetic memory that conditions our actions and understand that our own interior is the one that provides us with the key to reinvent ourselves, to go back to drawing with the invisible connections of a positive energy that allows us to access and multiply different perceptions of the world. Calvino noticed in his own literary processes that nothing is classifi-

able, that everything escapes the pigeon-hole since it can be seen and interpreted in multiple ways.

When Bigas Luna cites his most important references, the Altamira caves appear and all the basic mechanisms that are repeated throughout the cultures of all human history: things that should not be unlearned, such as recognising the biological function and memory that is recorded in the cells of our bodies; the permanent interrelation between all the elements of nature that link us to all others; the ancestral memory that connects us to food and the way of interacting with the work, as he did when he stepped on the covers stretched out on the ground to see how they worked, to know their rhythms and await results. And we could continue talking about his cultural links with the Renaissance, Duchamp, Buñuel, Vittorio De Sica, Warhol or Beuys, amongst others, but pride of place goes to Goya, a constant presence as a painter and as a person. We can see him in different stages of his cinema, where actors move into and compose well-known tableaux: from the executions to the *Caprichos*, as well as sequences including *Duelo a garrotazos* in *Jamón, jamón* (1992), which even ventures into the mystery of the interpretation of the *Maja desnuda*.

*Goya is an artist central to my life. In Caniche (1978) I reproduced some of his Caprichos and a picture of the Duchess of Alba... I think it was a premonition of me doing Volavérunt (1999). (...) I have produced a human portrait of him during his time in Madrid, which is the period in which he had dealings with the Duchess and the whole social set of which was a part. Goya has had an enormous influence on me.*

The mix of forms and 'the changing limits of the body' in the figures appearing in Goya set off a fusion of anatomies where the interior and the exterior are

17 Hustvedt, Siri. *Los misterios del rectángulo* [Mysteries of the Rectangle: Essays on Painting]. Barcelona, Circe, 2007.

fused. From the impossible line of suture that Baudelaire saw in the *Caprichos*, ‘this cut, this threshold or limit between one object and another (...) has become blurred (...), making his transformations appear natural since despite their supernatural aspect they are profoundly related to lived experience’. The entrances and exits of the body, the desire for food and sex, creative and sexual energy, lactation, the mouth that looks like a vagina, suspended bodies, references to the Crucifixion... Like Goya, Bigas has also played at including his presence in his photography, whether via a shadow or capturing two expressions on a single face. Many of his symbols are related with ‘the problem of seeing and not seeing, revealing and obscuring, a fundamental drama in the story of any seduction’<sup>18</sup>, as Hustvedt puts it.

Bigas Luna’s preoccupation with the human contradiction draws him to those thresholds where light and emotional perspectives join the shadows to recover an essence. We can see then that the presence of Goya was hugely important in his life and, surely, he would have enthusiastically applauded the speech he gave in 1792 at the Real Academia de San Fernando, when he avowed that there are no rules to be followed in painting. The oppression or servile obligation of making everyone study or follow a single path is a great impediment for the young people who practice this most difficult art’. His interest in presenting himself as an artist of the moment meant that scenes of lived experience were increasingly important and, in 1796, the irony that distanced him from prescribed genres or commissions, without any restrictions on the imagination was, according to Hustvedt, the illness.

### More by Bigas and more by Luna

Accepting the nature of *bio* and *trans*, that there are new ways of thinking and living, that every discipline crosses into many others, that things cannot now be separated into watertight compartments, as Ángel Kalenberg put it<sup>19</sup>, the dissolving of genres is a

fact in which everything interacts to show up the problems of our age.

‘We always go hunting for something hidden’, noted Calvino, ‘or that is only potential, hypothetical, and we follow the trails that appear on the surface of the ground’. Everything occurs in order to open up new and old paths for exploration, to transform the image we have of things and escape from a petrified world, from the ties that bind us to convention and constraints. The only option is the movement and the energy of an intelligence capable of unblocking, deprogramming and reinventing, to make possible the invisible connections and correspondences between different disciplines.

Like Kapuscinski, without any concerns about whether he was working on journalism or a novel, who gave us multiple variants and registers of language, we prefer to trap the many characters that exist in ourselves so that they may strengthen each other, with the aim of generating more stories by Bigas and more by Luna.

### Glòria Bosch

(Camp de Tarragona - Barcelona,  
28 August 2014 - 18 March 2015)

An exhibition on Bigas Luna  
can be seen at:

**Fundació Vila Casas**  
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Carrer Roc Boronat 116-126. 08018 Barcelona  
Until December 20<sup>th</sup>



18 Siri Hustvedt, op. cit., p17.  
19 Ángel Kalenberg from the catalogue for the exhibition *Ingestum*, p.77. Valencia, IVAM, 2008.

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