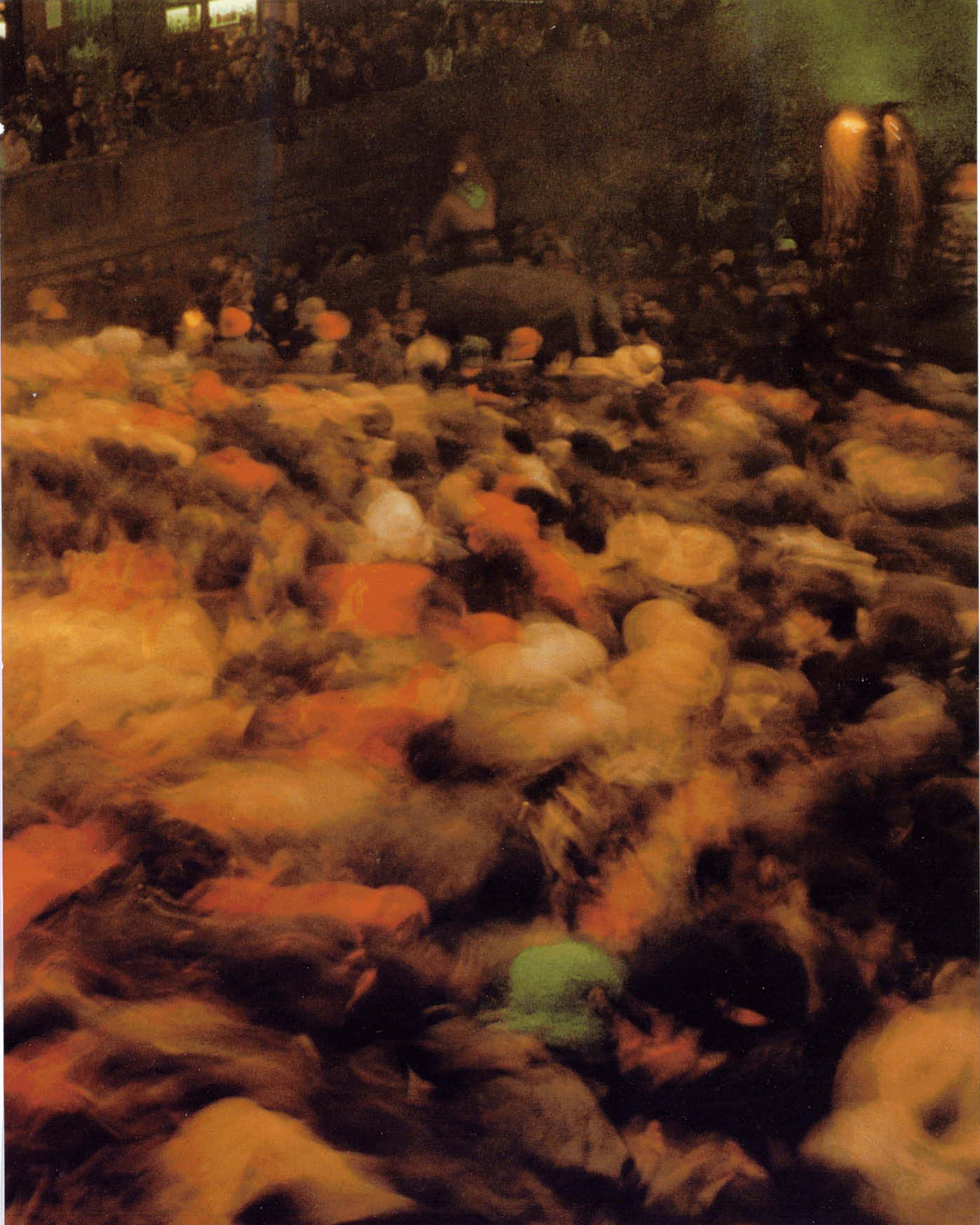


IN THIS DOSSIER WE ARE PRESENTING A REPERTORY OF TRADITIONAL POPULAR FESTIVALS OF THE PAÏSOS CATALANS. WE HAVE CHOSEN FESTIVALS WHICH ARE CHARACTERISTIC OF THE DIFFERENT CATALAN REGIONS AND HAVE VARIED ORIGINS. FESTIVALS, WITH THEIR ART, THEIR SENSUALITY AND THEIR SYMBOLISM, PROVIDE A GLIMPSE OF THE MYSTERY OF EACH COUNTRY, OF ANCIENT MYTHOLOGIES, OF THE COLLECTIVE HOPES AND FEARS. FOR US IN CATALONIA, OUR FESTIVALS ARE DEAR TO US AS AN EXPRESSION OF OUR IDENTITY, AND OUR PARTICIPATION IN OUR TRADITIONAL FESTIVALS HAS GROWN WITH THE ARRIVAL OF DEMOCRATIC FREEDOM. YOUNG PEOPLE ARE NOW THE MOST DETERMINED PROTAGONISTS OF OUR FESTIVALS, WHICH HAVE BECOME RITUALS OF THE CATALAN SPIRIT AND OF JOYFUL AND OPEN COMMUNICATION.





THE CATALAN FESTIVE HERITAGE



OVER THE AGES, CATALONIA HAS BUILT UP A REPERTORY OF COLLECTIVE CELEBRATIONS WHICH, ALONG WITH HER HISTORICAL, NATURAL AND LINGUISTIC HERITAGE, CONTRIBUTES TO HER PARTICULAR PERSONALITY.



MODEST REIXACH DIRECTOR. FUNDACIÓ SERVEIS DE CULTURA POPULAR

Like any other nation, Catalonia has over the ages built up a repertory of collective celebrations which, along with her architectural, artistic, historical, natural and linguistic heritage, contributes to her particular, differentiated personality. This festive heritage is made up of general celebrations which are common to the whole of the cultural community, and of a host of festivals that are specific to more reduced areas and local groups. The more localized festivals are often one area's specific, unique form of a more generalised celebration.

Inventories and Classifications

As in other fields of our cultural heritage, popular and traditional celebrations have experienced a considerable boom in the last few years, both in the rural areas, in spite of disappearances as a result of depopulation, and, especially, in the urban areas. The revival has shown itself in an increase in the number and quality of the celebrations and in the growing interest they arouse among the observers of social life, the media and students of subjects as varied as anthropology, history, sociology, geography, economics and the history of art. Proof of this is the recent publication in Catalonia of an exhaustive account of existing festivals, which lists more than eight thousand of them for a population of some six million inhabitants. Successive volumes on other parts of the linguistic community will eventually complete this corpus of Catalan festivals, which combines a series of general elements common to all the regions (Catalonia, País Valencià, Balearics, Catalonia North and Andorra), with a wide range of types and specific characteristics.

There is a basic classification made up of seven essential categories: the *festa major*, neighbourhood celebrations, votive feasts, patron festivals, civic celebrations, gatherings and fairs.

The most important festivals throughout the territory cover the whole of the annual cycle and are often linked to remote calendars, such as the Celtic, Jewish or Roman calendars, and to different cycles, of which the most noticeable is the agricultural and farming cycle. The most direct relationship is with the Christian liturgical calendar and,

in more recent times, with the tourist trade and the holiday period.

Some of the Most Characteristic Festivals

Leaving to one side the more universal celebrations, such as Christmas, Carnival, Holy Week and Easter, which take on very specific forms in the countries of Catalan culture, and the strictly local events, I shall mention some of the most characteristic general celebrations. By general I don't mean those festivals that are no more than an official day off work which has been declared a holiday, so much as those days which, whether or not they are official holidays, have generated the greatest wealth and profusion of celebrations around the country. Sometimes these are festivals that are also celebrated in other, neighbouring cultural communities to the north or south—the Catalan culture isn't an isolated one—but with distinct characteristics.

Sant Jordi (Saint George)

The feast of Sant Jordi (23rd April) isn't a bank holiday, but is one of the most specific and original celebrations in the Catalan area. The day of Sant Jordi, patron saint of Catalonia and of plenty of other countries, is one with a strong patriotic, human and cultural significance. Over the years, Sant Jordi has become a peaceful celebration of Catalan identity. Much of its present popularity stems from the need of stateless nations to demand their right to exist as a people, especially in times of repression and persecution such as the Franco regime in Spain. It's therefore a political festival in the broadest sense of the word. This powerful connotation of resistance and national affirmation underlying the Sant Jordi celebration is materialized in two things that have become the most characteristic and the irreplaceable elements of the celebration: the book and the rose. More books are bought as presents on Sant Jordi than on any other day of the year and it's also a day when a great many publishing novelties appear. Women are presented with roses by their suitors, husbands, fathers, sons or friends. Not only is the custom alive, it also grows year after year, its gratuity vigorously

reinforcing its symbolism. One of the most beautiful sights one could hope to lay eyes on is to be found in the streets and squares of towns and villages, brought to life by the mass of stands selling books and roses, always under the constant symbol of the Catalan flag. In Catalonia, Sant Jordi has become the almost perfect synthesis of the concepts of nation, culture and love.

Sant Josep (Saint Joseph)

Another widespread traditional celebration is that of Sant Josep (19th March). More extended than Sant Jordi throughout the Països Catalans, it reaches its maximum splendour in the País Valencià with the traditions of *les falles*, or the burning of massive cardboard figures and sculptures in the streets and squares.

Sant Joan (Saint John), or the Summer Solstice

A little later on (24th June) is the festivity of Sant Joan, full of remote echos and the most widespread festival of the Països Catalans and of the Mediterranean in general. Once again its most frequent manifestation is in fire. Like a trail of gunpowder, the bonfires spread across the hills and plains, the towns and villages of the whole of the Catalan area, from the high planes of the Pyrenees to the Mediterranean islands, where it takes on one of its most splendid forms in the town of Ciutadella, in Menorca, with a fantastic spectacle of light and horses.

Festivals and the Community

This isn't the place for a description of the social content of these festivals or of the Catalan festive heritage. This would call for a discussion of the food, the organizing bodies, the music and dance, the clothing, real and fantastic figures, the religious and civic acts, the games, competitions and exhibitions, the sports events and the magical world of the fairstalls and the open-air shows.

I shall end simply by remarking that our mechanized and programmed society seems to rediscover in popular celebrations the spirit of the unifying dream, of the communal game and of solidary evasion, all of them circumstances that are of great benefit to the human and social condition. ●