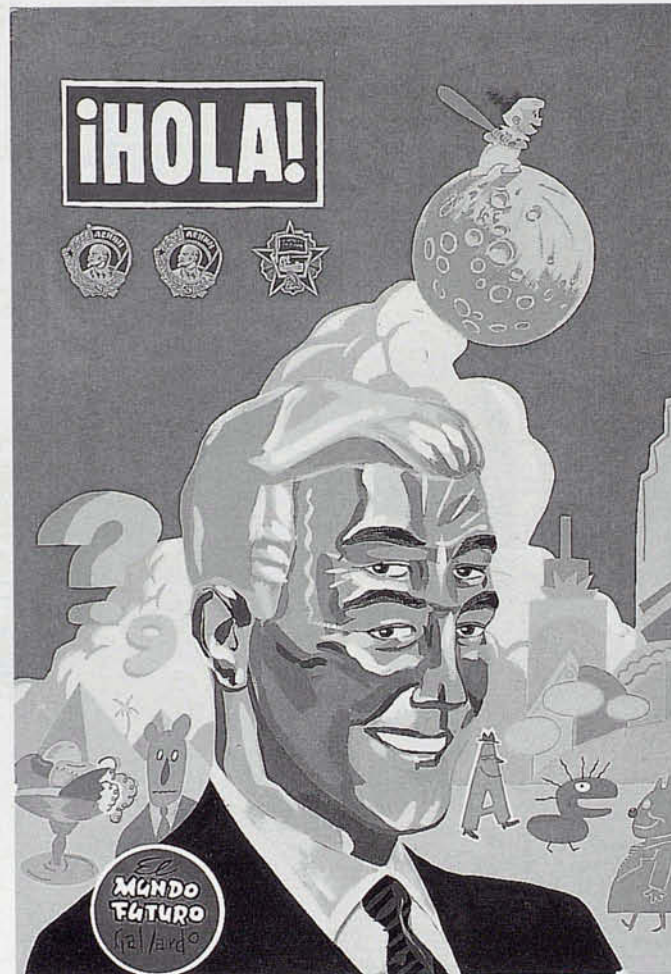


MIGUEL GALLARDO JOURNEY TO THE HEART OF PULP



MIGUEL GALLARDO. EL MUNDO FUTURO. BARCELONA, 1993.

OF ALL THE SURVIVORS OF THE BARCELONA UNDERGROUND, GALLARDO IS PERHAPS THE ONE WHOSE GRAPHICS ARE THE MOST VERSATILE. HIS DISCOURSE, ONE OF THE MOST COMPLEX, OFTEN CONCEALS A HARSH CRITICISM OF MODERNITY.

JORDI COSTA JOURNALIST



MIGUEL GALLARDO. EL VIGIA DE L'EST. L'HOMME INVISIBLE, PRATS & REY EDITORS. BARCELONA, 1989

Imagine a place where Sidney the Elephant, Dalí-brand soft watches, Gerald McBoing, Elvis Costello, Chester Gould's bad-dies, the invaders from Mars dressed by William Cameron Menzies, the Picassian synthesis, the emblematic chicken that advertises Avecrem soup, the door that opens onto the Twilight Zone, the inordinate eyes from the dream in *Recuerda* before being wounded by those hypertrophied scissors with their Freudian symbolism, Modigliani's languorous women, a spaceman right out of the fifties and a whole lot more creatures from the most disparate sentimental and aesthetic universes could all live happily together. I'm not talking about the Garden of Eden. And it's not the junk room in the den of some omnivorous cultural consumer: it's the poster for the latest exhibition by Miguel Gallardo, from

Lleida, a man who has managed to endow his paintbrush with a capacity for levelling which is similar to death's. Tall and short, noble and plebeian, sublime and abominable, Picasso and Avecrem, all merge into a single being under Gallardo's brushwork. The exhibition had the title *Pulp Art*, a term coined by Carles Prats, who always finds the right word and who also contributed a solid theoretical basis to the selection of the artist's work: Pulp Art, according to Prats, is a kind of false Pop Art fed on recognizable references—to consumer objects, comic strip characters, strictly everyday objects—but not with the more or less realistic vocation that inspired Warhol and his followers on their crusade against abstract expressionism, but with the risky objective of abandoning the spectator to cryptic or alarming interior worlds. Even so, the Gallardo-

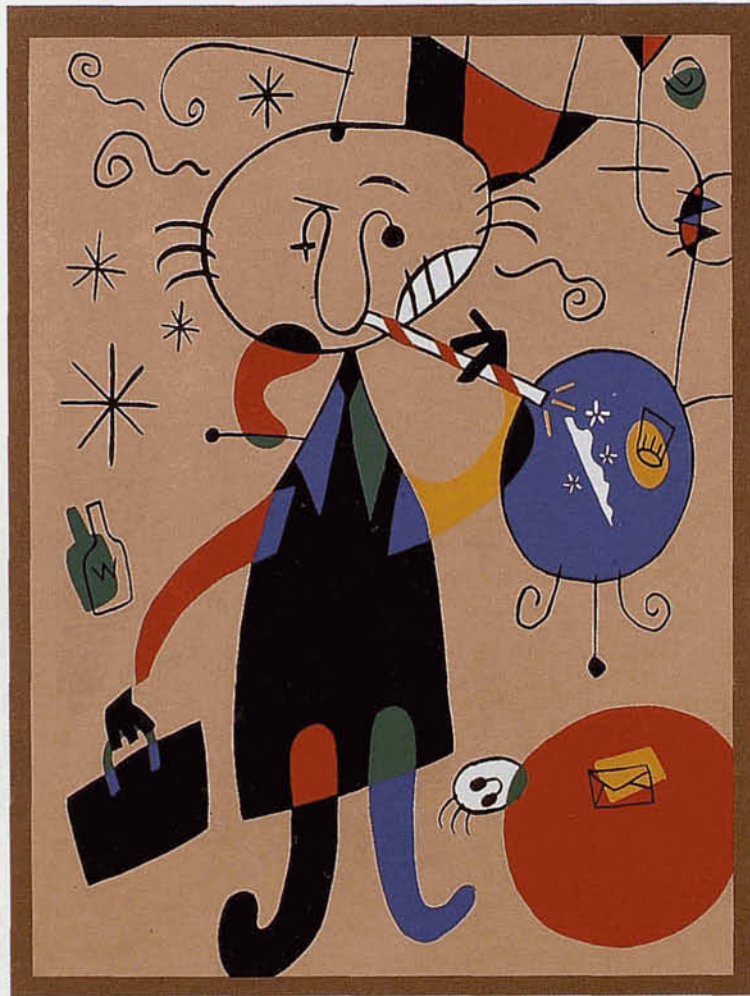
Working-Class-Artist who creates such extraordinary pictorial items of Pulp Art is relatively recent: behind him lies a brilliant career in illustrated comic strips which speaks for his surprising ability to decipher the keys to his surroundings.

Of all the survivors of the Barcelona underground, Gallardo's drawing is possibly the most versatile, his discourse one of the most complex, though his work has never shown the temptation for gravity that distinguishes, say, the latest Max from the daring comic strip *Nosotros somos los muertos*. His vision of the world has never been so desperately gloomy as that of the untamable and prodigious Martí, either, although some of his more recent work seems to rival in its hallucinatory qualities the frequent trips into the inner hell of the creator of *Doctor Vértigo*. With an approach that could be described as



ALTERADOS
GALLARDO

MIGUEL GALLARDO. ESTADOS ALTERADOS. EL VÍBORA, No. 63. ED. LA CÚPULA. BARCELONA, 1988



MIGUEL GALLARDO. SANTI CANUTO AL ESTILO MIRÓ. EL VÍBORA, No. 100. ED. LA CÚPULA. BARCELONA, 1988

halfway between Rabelais and Fellini, Gallardo seems to make each of his comic strips into a festival—often the explicit subject of his stern chastisement of Modernity. His pages are sometimes like crowded dinner parties, rowdy static choreographies, arbitrary agglomerations of characters, colours and symbols removed with surgical precision from imaginary alien, sometimes antithetical universes. This apparent levity, contrasting with the latest Max, and the radical use of colour and hare-brained comedy, which put him on an orbit far out from the planet Martí, don't stop him bringing out the complex mechanisms in his work that will derange the reader once and for all and drive him over the edge.

The very definition of Pulp Art, as art that looks at the inner pulp of things, shows that today's Gallardo is an artist given over to introspection, a creator

who, following the cannibalization of all the different landmarks of the history of art—of art with a capital 'A' and of art with a small 'a', of course—seems to have withdrawn into a fertile solipsism which some readers may find impenetrable. But before this, Gallardo was a comic strip illustrator with twenty—or twenty thousand—windows open onto the world around him. Along with Juanito Mediavilla—his scriptwriter and mentor, as well as one of the most astonishing word-tamers our country's comic has ever known—, Gallardo provided the angriest—and also the most festive—portrayal of the Barcelona of the seventies with *Las aventuras de Makoki*, a work which began life under the graphic influence of E.C. Segar—the father of Popeye—and which brought together a repertory of characters as extraordinarily credible as they were impossible, who had no-

thing to envy the curious creations of the "Thimble Theater". Makoki, an escaped lunatic with nitroglycerine in his veins and a headpiece for electroshock treatment as his main sign of identity, led a sinister gang of underworld characters in an urban and human landscape full of transparent references to the Barcelona of the time, characterized by its seething marginal culture and the anti-everything approach that was soon to lose its point.

The fact that the adventures of Makoki have managed to outlive their topicality to become a timeless classic with no sell-by date confirms the youthful maturity of the Gallardo-Mediavilla partnership. But Gallardo's eye and ear didn't end with the seventies: the birth of Modernity, this epidemic of tomfoolery that affected the cream of the country's cultural scene, found its own private Torquemada in the figure of



MIGUEL GALLARDO. PEPITO MAGEFESA. CAIRO. NORMA ED. BARCELONA, 1982

Gallardo, the author of the pitiless work *Las aventuras de Pepito Magefesa*, an immortal jewel, a complete catalogue of winks and nudges, private and public jokes, mind-blowing caricatures and inexorable snippets from life. Its universe of Argentine psychoanalysts, divine artistes, ridiculous dilettantes, evil fat men, avenging comic illustrators and aloof design queens, brought to life by a veritable uproar of seasonal jargon, vogue words and verbal mutations, was an early step on the path towards the pop expressionism of the latest Gallardo, but it still worked perfectly as a mirror of an age that was crying out for the thrashing that Pepito Magefesa and his merciless creator dealt out to it page after page.

The adventures of Pepito Magefesa were the proof: Gallardo devoured every-

thing, from the painting of the masters to the worst film the cinema-goer can conceive of. Soon, though, his voracity led him to lose interest in the world outside (the ridiculous "Modelnidad" of the eighties was unquestionably more interesting than the Mediocrity that dominated the nineties) and gave himself up to a suggestive and –what a wonderful word– post-modern game. Involuntarily becoming the ideological heir to Frank Henenlotter –director of trash cinema and formulator of the theory that an abysmally bad film transcends its condition and is transported to a superior aesthetic plane–, Gallardo is apparently intent on grovelling in the sewers of art. His references now are to the third-rate: cheap novels, atrocious films, forgotten cartoon characters. With them he creates aesthetic edifices

that look like clichés but in fact are mirages of clichés, because the reader soon senses that this accumulation of commonplaces, outline characters and substandard writing don't make up a conventional second-rate work, but a strange game, enigmatic, obscure and absorbing, that fascinates some and horrifies others. Gallardo's aesthetic adventure is unexplored territory. He can always turn back (his latest comic strips of *Perico Carambola en la cresta de la cola* in a Barcelona newspaper are one example: his transgression of the Bruguera format bring to mind Pepito Magefesa, both in its style and in its tendency to satirize current affairs), but his most faithful readers hope he won't, that he'll go on, and they rub their hands in anticipation of the forthcoming *Viaje al Centro de la Pulpa*. ■