

EL PORT DE LA SELVA, LANDSCAPE WITH POETS



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EL PORT DE LA SELVA, A FISHING VILLAGE, IS TRULY ONE WITH THE SEA. AND THE WATER OFFERS UP TO IT THE BEAUTY OF EVERY EVENING AND THE DELIGHT OF THE TRANQUIL BLUE, SHELTERED FROM THE BLUSTERING "TRAMUNTANA".

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Montserrat Vayreda, who knows the landscape so well, speaks to us of the “magical Empordà”, full of contrasts, of nature facing the sea, perched on the mountains, sweet in the valleys, full of light, of prehistory and history. And this, all of this, can be found in El Port de la Selva.

But if the history weren't there, there would be enough with the light, from its millenarian monastery of Sant Pere de Rodes to its sometimes mellow, sometimes rugged sea. The town, born facing west, looks out on the most picturesque of sunsets –impressive and always different, light as art– haloing the boats moored in the shining mirror of the port. And after the light, El Port de la Selva for me has been J.V. Foix. At El Port I was able to enjoy the memory of him, of his ever enriching talk. His house opposite mine; through all the years in which the joy of seeing him was possible for me, I would cross the narrow street and climb the long staircase that led me to the great poet: Foix, smiling, welcoming, would invite me to sit and talk with him. History, life, art, his work, the landscape, humankind...

The house is close to the old Port de Reig, which gives onto a square –shaded by a gigantic tree– that now contains cars and telephone boxes. And the place still “casts the net” of so many past memories from Foix's house, in the street just above.

Like Cadaqués, El Port de la Selva was surrounded by vineyards. The phylloxera, in a now far-off time, and tourism, which has altered its way of life, have, on many terraces, changed the vines for white holiday homes and orchards.

El Port de la Selva, an offshoot of La Selva de Mar, and independent for the last two hundred years, stretches beside its mother the sea, caressing her with its gaze; loving her. This fishing village is truly one with the sea. And the water offers up to it the beauty of every evening and the delight of the tranquil blue, sheltered from the blustering *tramuntana*.

The sea, beside it, still sees the *sardana* danced with utter spontaneity, in the fraternity of many of those who, coming from the cities, live the peaceful summer nights beside the beach, just at the beginning of the promenade that bears the name of the admired Foix. Here the poet Tomàs Garcés, from delicate La Selva, came to visit him. Here the journalist Joaquim Ventalló, summer after



summer, lives out the fullness of his nonagenarian youth, also rich in memories and friendships.

At El Port de la Selva, when you raise your eyes to the heavens, they come to rest on the stones of Sant Pere de Rodes, in the clear mornings of almost every day. The monastery is the sought after presence of an unforgotten past-present, never abandoned by the love of the people. Its reconstruction, followed as lovingly as it is carried out, is slowly returning to the stones the voice of their profound message.

The paths that lead there are the ones that Garcés, or Foix, or Ventalló, climbed on foot from El Port. Nowadays they are asphalted ribbons that comfortably deliver visitors from all over the world at the monastery's feet. Also from all over the world are the people at the foot of the mountain, preceded by people from Girona and Barcelona. More than one visitor from France or Germany also tries to speak –and speaks– Catalan. The village, in the sea's embrace, attracts lovers of its rocks, which illustrate the truth of the Catalan saying that “A fishing village is a welcoming village”.

In summer, the local shopkeepers and traders have to work every day of the season, which is increasingly concentrated into the month of August; but the whole of the fixed population knows that with the autumn will come the *Festa Major*, the real holiday, nothing to do with the one at the height of summer that receives the same name. In the autumn, the locals live their holiday, the most eagerly awaited, the genuine celebration, under the same sky and beside the same sea that, in the words of Salvador Dalí, “reflects the dramas of the twilight skies”.

In El Port, Josep Maria Sagarra is brought to life for us by “El Cafè de la Marina”. His work brings him back with all his creative force and in the memory of his immaculate white suit. From here arose, for the theatre, *El Cafè de la Marina*, for poetry, *Cançons de rem i de vela*, and for prose, *All i salobre*. Sagarra, like Alexandre Plana, was a pillar of intellectuality. Also from this happy corner of the world were the ancestors of the sculptor Frederic Mares, who, enamoured of the rocks that kiss the sea, transformed stone into living works of art.

Distant walls watch over the landscapes of El Port de la Selva in the paintings by Freixes Cortés, the watercolours by Boddallo or the oils by Mariné. The bay is an amphitheatre, the setting for the constant spectacle of the sea watched over by the rocks, poor in sand, rich in coves, in molluscs and in colours. We could say of El Port de la Selva the same as Josep Pla says of Cadaqués: “The sea is close at hand, everything is so steeped in the marine drama that it is impossible not to live the spectacle”. The joy of being in its blazing twilights. The streets, between white walls, climb the hillside –narrow, steep, uneven, primitive... The Carrer de la Costa, or the Carrer de Cala Prona, crossed by the Carrer de la Unió, the Carrer Major, the Carrer de les Ginesteres... and the Carrer de Dalt as far as Les Figuerasses. With the sea at his feet and the sky above his head, man has been there from the beginning of time: his dolmens bear witness, the necropolises bring him back out of the remote past.

By day the seagulls are the lords of the bay, the sun plays hide and seek among the clouds, the bells on the boats speak of a gentle *tramuntana*... With the night the lights appear across the water. And the becalmed village lives in an immense peace.

Today, on its naked mountains –wood-felling left the rocky earth almost devoid of greenery– the replanted pines are returning their life to them. The abandoned monastery is, in a slow rebirth, capable of bringing to life in our hearts the times when it was active and the undulating surfaces covered in vines. The light that kisses the land, like the sea, from thousands of moments, continues to kiss, in gratitude, the beauty of the simple white houses, clustered by the sea, to the north of Cape Creus. ■