

MIRALDA AND THE ART OF MARRYING CULTURES

THE ART OF MIRALDA LIES AT THE CROSSROADS OF FESTIVE ART, POPULAR CULTURE, THE CONSUMER SOCIETY AND THE CULTURAL BEHAVIOUR OF RACES AS A FORM OF COMMUNICATION.

PILAR PARCERISAS ART CRITIC



In Miralda it's difficult to tell where the space reserved for art lies and which is the space devoted to life. Transgressing artistic codes, he acts on the basis of his individuality in the field in which the group identity and sub-conscious usually show themselves. Miralda's art lies at the crossroads between festive art, popular culture, the consumer society, *kitsch* and the cultural behaviour of races as a form of communication. It is therefore an art based on feeling, plurisensorial as life itself, and opens a new dimension of the art event, based on the merging of

art and reality, transporting imagination and fantasy to a special cultural territory.

After a career spanning twenty-five years, it becomes difficult to choose a term out of the long list of words available in the dictionary of contemporary art with which to qualify or classify the work of Miralda: actions, ceremonials, happenings, environments, might come close to the ephemeral spirit of his work and to the sense of time he incorporates quite naturally into his artistic ideas. Perhaps Miralda has discovered a new kind of art: the art of the party, of the

celebration, an art which transports us to the meeting point between magic, ceremony and ritual, rooted in our common heritage as a cultural archetype, and a frontier land where the sacred and the profane, religion and paganism live side by side.

A Cultural Crossroads

Miralda is an artist with a universal vocation. He belongs to the generation of Catalan artists of the sixties, who started on the international adventure very early, in an attempt to push back frontiers and broaden creative horizons.

In the Paris of the sixties, where he started working for the magazine *Elle*, he discovered the *kitsch* aspect of the France of the Salons and meringues, a society in which imperialism made itself felt in the military parades and rituals and in the monuments, out of which was to come a series of works like the *Cenotaphes* and compositions and



environments of objects covered in little plastic soldiers, which acquired a special texture.

In Paris he was also to discover edible and ceremonial art, crossing the border of classifiable art for the first time with the first festivals of colour: *Memorial* (Vedronne, 1969), *Festa en blanc* (1970) and *Ritual dels quatre colors*, presented at the 1971 Paris Biennial.

During those same years, London was to mean a meeting with the pop culture, the large phosphorescent neons, the festive decoration of the department stores and the consumer society.

After 1972, New York was the prolongation of this consumer festival previously discovered in London. The co-existence of frequently antagonistic races and customs, physical and cultural cross-breeding, the presence of contemporary society's new myths and rites, took the work of Miranda towards universal parameters.

An International Artist

Cities such as Kassel, Sidney, Kansas, Houston, Miami, New York, Barcelona or Tokyo were the international setting for his artistic actions of the seventies and eighties, of which the most important are *Festa für Leda*, inspired in the theme of Leda and the swan and presented at the 1977 Kassel Documenta, in which a tableaux recreates ancient fertility myths in a celebration of life; *Breadline* (Houston, 1977), an installation action with four thousand loaves of coloured bread and featuring the "Rangerettes" in the inaugural performance; *Mona a Barcelona* (Barcelona, 1980), which consisted of a giant chocolate model reproducing the principal moments of the city, and *Weat & Steak* (Kansas City, 1981), where, on the occasion of the harvest festival regularly held in the city, Miralda created a ceremonial banquet and a series of symbolic elements for the parade.

In the last few years, Miralda has become a citizen of the world, in search of the cross-breeding of cultures and cultural exchanges between races and continents, in an artistic proposal without frontiers, *Holy Food* (1985), an encounter between western religious imagery and that of the Yoruba religion, on the basis of a supermarket culture.

His two most recent projects constitute the best example of this attempt to intervene artistically in a specific cultural reality and to provoke the public's sensorial participation. The creation of the restaurant *El Internacional* in New York during 1984 and 1985 was one of Miralda's most difficult, complex and utopian projects, only beaten by *Honeymoon*, the latest dream, still in preparation.



El Internacional is the culminating point for Miralda's idea of the banquet as a ceremonial act and for the environmental and participative nature of his work. The reconstruction and design of its interior, the idea of certain festive events, like the coronation of the restaurant with a replica of the Statue of Liberty's crown installed at the top of the façade, and Montse Guillén's culinary contributions, made this restaurant project one of the most charismatic experiences of the meeting between art and life which so concerns this artist. *Honeymoon* will consist in the marriage of two ancient monuments: the New York Statue of Liberty and the Barcelona Monument to Columbus. This project, which will go on until 1992, the five hundredth anniversary of the dis-



covery of America, is intended as a tribute to the exchange of ideas, customs and products which have linked the New World and the Old, and will take the form of a number of events, ceremonies and exhibitions dedicated to the celebration of this imaginary marriage: the dress and the wedding ring, the bride's bouquet, the love letters, the offerings to Columbus, the banquets planned..., this is an ambitious project which sets out to find the points of communication between two dissimilar continents, and which calls for collaboration and participation on both sides of the Atlantic.

With *Honeymoon*, Miralda has been selected to represent Spain at the 1990 Venice Biennial, which has set aside a special pavilion for him in recognition of an open-ended production and an extensive career. ■