



Exhibition «The Bruguera factory»  
21/01/ 2005 – 10/04/2005

## A contemporary tradition

Bruguera was one of the country's first cultural industries. It had few precursors, the Spanish film company Cifesa being, perhaps, the most noteworthy. Bruguera was a pioneer in discovering the culture of the masses, to whom its products, both comics and popular novels, were geared. This is why we have entitled the exhibition the *Bruguera Humour Factory*. And, as such, it played a major role in the construction of the Spanish post-Civil War imaginary, particularly in the sphere of humour, which enabled it to reach extremely diverse sectors of society, regardless of class or age.

In publication after publication, Bruguera's humour acquired coherence and continuity. Their cartoons have a universal, timeless appeal, as is characteristic of the genre, but, at the same time, they owe a debt to the development of Spain, from decade to decade, and constitute an encrypted chronicle of the misfortunes of a country seeking to escape from its historic fatalisms. The storyline is repeated: the game involving expectations which are always fatally dashed. Nevertheless, the objects of desire change: in the forties the main wish was for something as basic as food, because hunger was rife on the streets; in the sixties, attention turned to owning a flat or enjoying the privilege of paid holidays.

Bruguera's stories are as cruel and entertaining as life itself. The company hallmark is a certain brotherly masochism, which has as its outcome microviolence in personal relationships, but in a way that encourages you to laugh. The "naïf" side –a certain destructive ingenuity– is present in the characters, unfortunate witnesses to the reality that they are always out of step with reality.

During the construction process of the exhibition, it became clear that the Bruguera model of humour was still topical and relevant today. The renewed interest in Bruguera comics was not just an exercise in nostalgia. Above all, it was an updating of the sources of humour that remain very much alive today, albeit using new formats and media. It could be said that three comedy traditions were established in Spain during the post-Civil War years: the sarcastic and caricaturesque humour which is best expressed in the films of Berlanga and the scripts by Azcona; the *naff*, cheesy comedies of Paco Martínez Soria and Alfredo Landa; and the humour of Bruguera, witness to the ups and downs of everyday life, its frustrations and a certain latent rebelliousness in Spanish society.

The success of the film *Mortadelo y Filemón* serves as confirmation that the tradition survives. Ploughing the same furrow as the Bruguera factory, we find the Almodóvar of *Labyrinth of Passions*, the theatre company La Cubana and the Catalan TV series *Plats bruts*. And, in particular, recent successes such as *Siete vidas* or *Aquí no hay quien viva*, the true culmination of raising sadistic brotherliness to a mass cultural event. Bruguera captured some of the country's most deeply engrained characteristics. And this is where their success lies. Spain has changed, but there are enduring traits that emerge from below the scab on the bull's skin, to appear in Spanish households through the television screen, without distinguishing between nationalities and regions. Revisiting the Bruguera factory is, in this regard, an exercise that allows us to bring other perspectives to the understanding of today's popular culture. Because it seems that the laughter of peoples has some constants that are able to survive any revolution.