

El ficus del Parterre

(Sonia Berger)

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Incommensurable

To put into context this collection of works and publications by Ricardo Cases presented under the title «El ficus del Parterre», it may be helpful to consider two issues: on the one hand, the scenario to which the photographer had accustomed us — a rural Levante that could extend geographically from Catalonia to Murcia — has changed; on the other hand, so has the way of working and, consequently, the procedure for publishing and disseminating his pictures.

In the text he dedicated to the exhibition «Estudio elemental del Levante» at the Canal de Isabel II hall in Madrid in 2018, curator Horacio Fernández mentioned Calabuch, Luis García Berlanga's fictional Levantine village, as a possible reference to the «economic disruption» of this territory. It also referred to the novel «Crematorio» (*Crematorium*) and its author, Rafael Chirbes, as a creator who dared to «look at the other side of the coin, the dark side of the Levantine strength». In novels such as *Crematorio*, *La Buena Letra* and *En la Orilla*, Chirbes, like Berlanga, uses a fictitious Mediterranean town, Misent, to describe the radical transformation that the region underwent in the *real estate boom* years.

Pepe Misent is precisely the name under which Ricardo Cases began posting his pictures in December 2018 on an Instagram account. In the description of this account, we can read: «Veí de València (Resident in Valencia). Estampes quotidianes de transcendència aparent i colors vius» [«Neighbor of Valencia. Everyday pictures of apparent significance and bright colours»]. The use of a nickname and the medium that is chosen to publish his photographs mark the beginning of this new creative stage in which Ricardo moves away from the rural environment to immerse himself in the urban setting and, at the same time, gives up the idea of a photographic project — the long-term development of a small ambitious idea, related to a theme and using a particular language — to enter into a photographic adventure with no previous program, exploring the city and feeding a virtual space.

Maybe the change is not as radical as it seems, but rather a return to a way of doing things: this Pepe Misent, an anonymous neighbour from València, has features reminiscent of José Ramón — that other neighbour from Madrid to whom Ricardo wanted to pay homage in his first fanzine, *Supernormal #0* — , and also oozes some nostalgia for going out into the street to look for the news.» Then, pushed by the dynamics imposed by the work in the newspaper *El Mundo*, Ricardo decided to get rid of the responsibility of telling the essential daily events that occurred in the capital city, and he focused on those issues that were important to him, as was the case of José Ramón, janitor of the estate where he lived in Madrid. Moreover, this is how he developed «Serrano Boogie» or «La Ciudad que soy» («The city I am»), two unreleased projects developed at the end of the 2000s, in which he poured his intention to tell his story outside of the press commissioning.

Now, through this virtual container that is Pepe Misent, from which he is testing whether what he does has a form, a language, the photographer recovers his journalism heritage and becomes the director of his own newspaper. Time has given him confidence and maturity; he has created his own media and now has the printing press at home. The city becomes exciting again.

Furthermore, while the editorial staff of his particular newspaper was made up of friends and professionals in Valencia, he has also managed to establish a vast network of collaborators and accomplices with whom to re-edit the intense experience of photographing, publishing and disseminating autonomously.

His photography remains vibrant and flashing, mixing and overlapping the visual stimuli he meets in his path, ranging from forsaken oranges, sometimes large-format printed in supermarkets and advertisements, to the *smileys trouvés*. These short sentences are neither developed nor elaborated, usually articulated in a single photographic walk. The accelerated photo shooting is followed by the speedy process with which Ricardo selects the images to startup the printer at home and print short runs of 25 to 50 copies of publications that he will sell directly.

Agency and independence are traits that have already defined Ricardo's work and that of his colleagues in the Blank Paper group.

There was much talk about «critical thinking» at the time, about everyday action and practice with others. As we know, photography — like literature, cinema, etc. — is a work by many that connects us with others. Alternatively, as Cristina Rivera-Garza states about writing in her essay *Los Muertos Indóviles (The Untamed Dead)*, a task in which «there are no soloists, there is only accompaniment».

We also find continuity in that way of doing things with others. This new scenario combines the printer trio (an Epson V5000), the design (Tipode Office) and Ricardo's photography. The figure of Tipode Office, always prepared to experiment, and with whom he maintains an ongoing dialogue, is essential for all this material to flow within an intense scheme replicating the dynamics of going out on the streets to photograph, then returning home and publishing (virtually) the next day.

The autonomy provided to him by the Pepe Misent Instagram account, through which he sought to explore a new language, led to the publication of an 8-page fanzine with a print run of 50 copies at 5 euros: *Garaje Astoria* (2020), the first of a series of short and daring, but substantive essays, all of them focused on the city of Valencia. *Garaje Astoria* is an iconic garage in the Ruzafa neighbourhood with an emotional conditioning factor for Ricardo; it is one of those spaces that remain intact in a neighbourhood that has undergone a major transformation. The language he inaugurates is much more abstract: a hose as a *smiley*, peeling walls, dampness issues, and images with a different behaviour at a plastic level.

It is followed by *Géneros de punt La Torre* (2020) — an exploration of an underwear shop window, photographs also loaded with emotional material in a type of shop on the verge of extinction — ; *El ficus del Parterre* (2021), — a huge specimen that coexists with a gas station — ; *Recolección de cítricos ornamentales en Torreñiel* [Harvesting ornamental citrus fruits in Torreñiel] (2021) — a neighbourhood report made in one morning, which ties in very well with his journalism heritage — ; *Autorretrato* [Self- portrait] (2022) — a more leisurely compilation of images that draws on particular objects that he has found in the city and that, judging by the title, represent him — ; and *Gran Vía Fernando el Católico* (2022) ^{FFFFF} — a series in which a balloon directs him what to photograph and, in a gesture reminiscent of Garry Winogrand's compulsiveness, he lets himself be carried away by the experience without giving importance to what happens in the photographs.

In all these series, Ricardo Cases seems to drift himself apart from the reflexive act of photography, taking advantage of years of experience and confidence in his work to do without thinking. Upon arriving home, the result is reassuring, and he finds in the freshness of these photographic outings something that represents him and with which to put together a vision of «The city that is».

Another publication, *Calendario 2021*, somewhat different in character — due to its nature and the participation in the production of Ostras Pedrín and Dalpine — joins this production. It also reflects Cases' intuitive reaction to the city. Tipode Office again signs its design.

In addition to the designer and the machine he uses to print, it is interesting to note the dissemination network he relies on to carry out this costly — both in time and materials — and high-quality production. As far as distribution is concerned, the purpose is to get in direct contact with the interested public through, on the one hand, its own website and a platform such as Todocolección, and, on the other hand, bookstores and trade fairs. Tenderete, a local illustration trade fair in Valencia, was the first one he attended.

There is a precedent of a Valencian fanzine for immediate sale, which does not belong to this collection, but it is indeed an experience that also speaks of immediacy and the activation of spaces: *Bibop*. In 2017, photographers Pascual Arnal and Ricardo decided to photograph, produce and present a publication

in a single day. Tipode Office collaborated on the design, and it was printed in risography at the Per-r-
ucho bookstore on Moro Zeit Street in the El Carmen neighbourhood, where they presented it that same
afternoon, hand in hand with curator and art critic Ricardo Forriols.

In parallel, he also sells his fanzines at Novedades Casino, the store that photographer Pablo Casino
initially opened on Bolsería Street
in the El Carmen neighbourhood. Currently, it is located on Cádiz Street and is open on «irregular hours»,
as can be read on the sign at the entrance. Together with Pablo, he also created CASA, a workroom in the
garden shed of his house — inspired by a group similar to the
one that photographer Juan Travnik used to gather in his home in Buenos Aires, whom Ricardo met
during a visit to Argentina with curator Claudi Carreras — , where participants can come to share their
photographic works.

Since two of his designer
friends founded the publishing
house Handshake in the Ruzafa neighbourhood, he has been attracted to them like a magnet and visits
them regularly. They boldly created the Recreo Valencia Art
Book Trade Fair in 2020. The fact
that this project was launched at a time of global uncertainty reveals the dynamic creative fabric that — at
least from a distance — seems to have developed in the city in recent years. For Ricardo, this Valencian
network
is essential. Through such a network, he has created his own group and chain of supporters and
established
a working relationship and friendship similar to the one he once had in Madrid.

Finally, the question remains about how these short publications
fit in with his books. Fanzines do not show the behind-the-scenes of his work. These are not unfinished or
provisional sketches, although they may form part of or be the seed of other more extensive and
thoughtful publications in the future. In principle, these two types of publications converge in a
photographer who tirelessly explores all possible aspects of writing and feels the need both
to work for the long term and to let himself be carried away by intuition, which can be as exciting or more
interesting than the very thought-out. Since he published that first fanzine dedicated to José Ramón,
Ricardo discovered the pleasure of print,
and his catalogue has not stopped growing, immeasurable, singular
and unavoidable as the Ficus of the Parterre or the idea of the city itself.