

JORDI BERNET



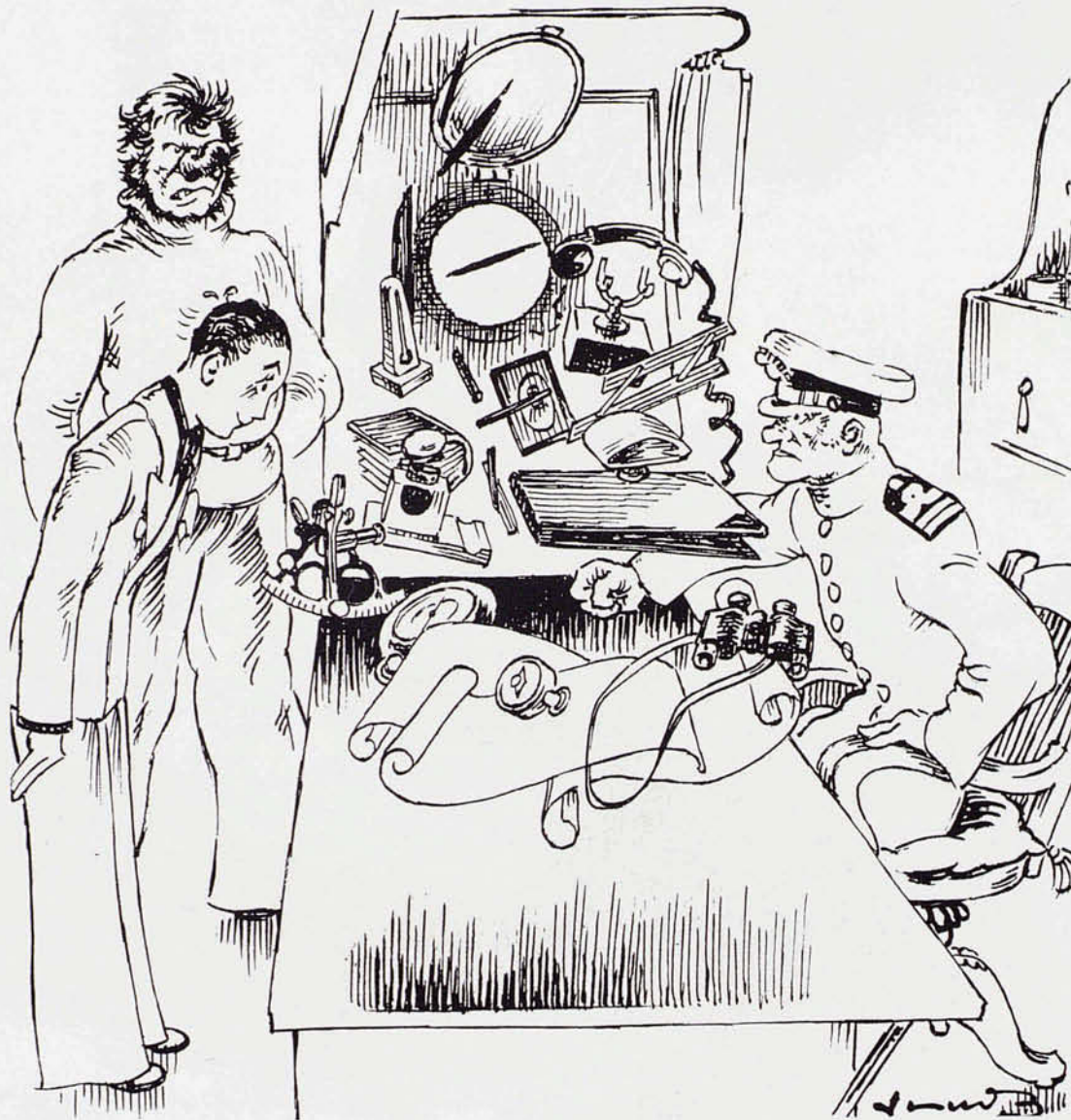
J. BERNET. DAN LACOMBE. SPIROU. ÉD. DUPUIS, PARIS, 1968



J. BERNET. AB-IRATO. TOTEM. TOUTAIN ED, BARCELONA, 1990

JORDI BERNET IS ONE OF THE OBVIOUS HEIRS TO THE GREAT GENERATION OF CATALAN CARTOONISTS: CORNET, LLAVERIAS, OPISSO, JUNCEDA. AS HE HAS GRADUALLY SOAKED UP THE TRADITION, HIS CONCEPTION OF THE PAGE HAS BECOME BOLDER, THE LINE FREER AND MORE DEMANDING, AND THE FORMS MORE CATEGORICAL IN THEIR DEFINITION OF THE LIGHT.

CARLES PRATS JOURNALIST AND AUTHOR



JOAN JUNCEDA. PEN AND INK DRAWING FOR *LES FORMIDABLES AVENTURES DE PERE FI*. BIBLIOTECA PATUFET. BARCELONA, 1934

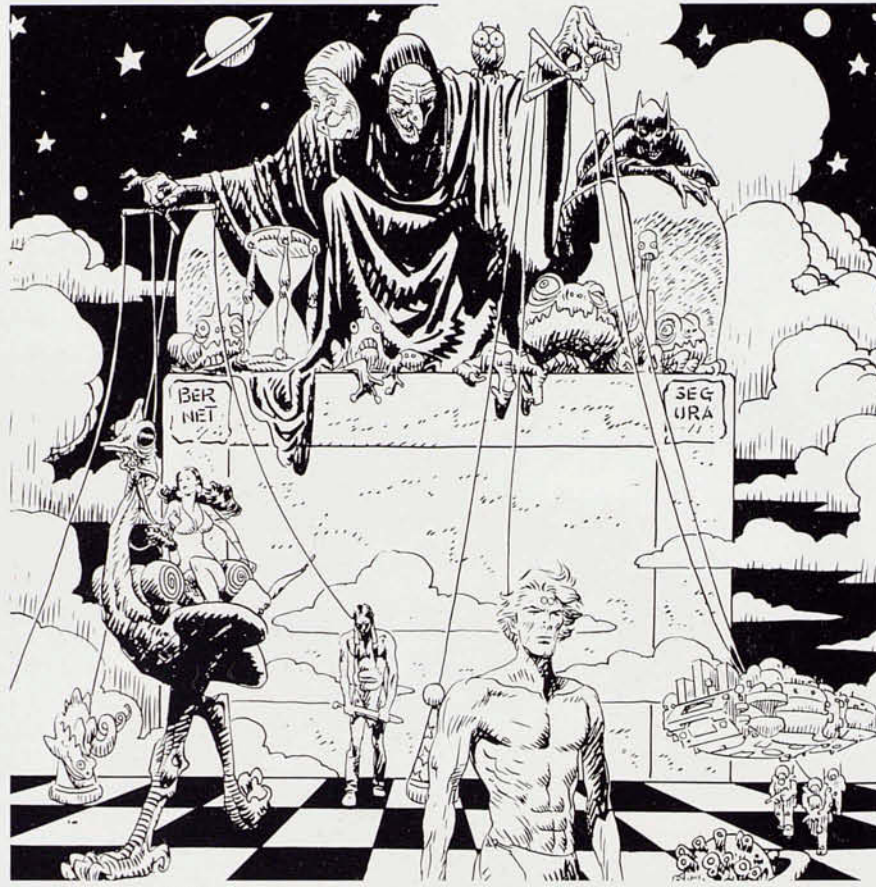
From Miró Year I would choose, amongst other things, Català-Roca's photographs, especially the ones showing Miró carried away by his work; for example, in the workshop at Gallifa, working on the IBM mural with a bucket and a broom, or at Son Boter, in Mallorca, painting with his fingers or busily stirring coffee cups full of pigments. I like this sensation of hyperactivity, of immediacy. I believe far more strongly in an art produced with this vitality than in a colder, more distant art. Some people will tell me that itchy hands detract from ideas. Of course they don't. At least not necessarily. In Miró's case, it seems clear that the inter-

lectual process is there and the result, for example, is his splendid and very personal system of symbols.

In comics, hyperactivity is also a good sign. I think that in the majority of cases great works have been the result of frantic activity, of thousands of pages and even more thousands of frames. In other words, of the pressure of the industry. When there's a solid graphic concept, from the line or the light to the page layout, speed of realization is often an added value.

That's how I see it in the work of Jordi Bernet (born in Barcelona in 1944), especially in the last few years, which are my favourite period.

Bernet is the prototype of the excellent professional. Prematurely thrown into the world of comics on the death of his father—whose best-known character, Doña Urraca, he continued to draw for a brief period—, his knowledge of the medium is based on the legacy of advice handed on to other artists by his father (while he played in the studio in Sant Andreu) and also on the worship of the classics, both Catalan and American. In fact there are two authors who especially fascinate him: Noel Sickles, who introduced into the comic strip the system used by the German illustrators of making the lights out of spots (subsequently popularized by Milton



J. BERNET, SEGURA, SARVANE, DARGAN ED.

Caniff in series like *Terry i els pirates* or *Steve Canyon*), and Joan Junceda, perhaps the best Catalan illustrator of the century.

Junceda as a Reference

In spite of his precarious health, Junceda was another example of hyperactivity. A conservative estimate gives us something like 50,000 works, including illustrations and comic strips—in other words, about three a day from the time he took up professional drawing, assuming he never took a holiday and that he worked on Sundays. The daily figures for the pages Bernet drew have yet to be produced. There are two problems, though: some pages have been lost (such as the series *Andrax*, at the hands of an unscrupulous German publisher, amongst many others), and according to the artist himself, if he's not satisfied with them they go straight into the waste paper basket.

I've seriously considered talking to the dustman who does his neighbourhood, because this man's originals are highly prized items. For example, and so as to avoid quoting meaningless prices, one exchange that's known to have taken place was an original by Bernet for a strip from Alex Raymond's *Rip Kirby*. Or this other one: a page from *Dan Lacombe* (a series Bernet did during the sixties for the Belgian magazine *Spirou*) for one from Franck Robbins's *Johnny Hazard*. In other words, Bernet is on a level with Raymond and Robbins, two of the greatest; as if we were discussing Picasso or Jasper Johns in painting, so to speak.

This could be one of the signs that Bernet's work is well considered internationally. Another sign could be the fact that successful Hollywood producers wanted to make a film of *Torpedo*, a project that failed because of the intervention of a greedy intermediary who assigned

payment for Bernet and Abuli (the scriptwriter) of "one dollar and other unspecified profits".

What would have happened if Hollywood had showered Bernet with fistfuls of millions? He might have disappeared off the map, and then we would all have lost out.

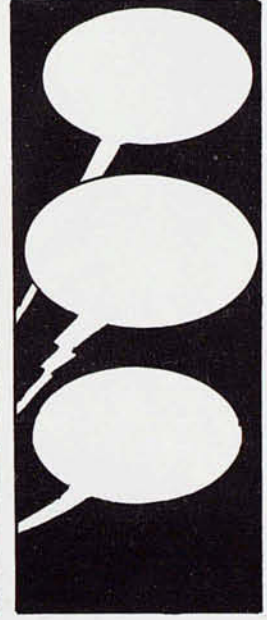
Whether for better or for worse, Jordi Bernet is living in his flat in Sant Andreu where he works at his magnificent comics and devotes at least one day a week to the search for originals or rare editions by his beloved Joan Junceda.

Personality and Tradition

Jordi Bernet is undoubtedly one of the most obvious heirs of a great generation of Catalan illustrators and comic strip writers. Cornet, Llaverias, Opisso, Junceda himself..., all coincided on magazines like *Cu-cut!* and shared out the subject of their drawings according to



J. BERNET-C. TRILLO. LIGHT & BOLD. TOUTAIN ED. BARCELONA, 1990



J. BERNET-ABULI. UN, DOS, TRES (THREE MOMENTS IN THE LIFE OF TORPEDO). TEMPO. HAMBURG, MUNICH, 1992



J. BERNET, IVANPIIRE, SPLATTER, MAKOKI, 1991

the instructions of the great Gaietà Cornet, as follows: Opisso, city life; Llaverias, the animals, and Junceda, the illustrations with uniformed characters (hotel porters, policemen, etc.) on the grounds that his father was in the military and that this had given him a natural aptitude.

This excellent generation, which should also include a few other names like Feliu Arias "Apa" (whose jokes earned him the French Legion's Grand Cross and who followed the path opened up in the last decades of the nineteenth century by writers like Apel.les Mestres), established specific characteristics for the Barcelona illustrators and comic strip writers based on an artistic feel for the trade which often transcends the more industrial aspects and encourages a taste for the creative line, the composition and narrative experimentation.

Thus in the case of Jordi Bernet we find a restless approach which becomes

more and more marked over the years, as if his ever deeper impregnation by tradition were reflected in his increasingly risky conception of the page, the freer, more demanding line, the faster forms which at the same time played a more decisive part in defining the light. And if we linger over each frame we can see distortions in the perspective, shading, ragged edges, cross-hatching, etc. that make for an often dizzying expressionism with a powerful narrative effect. If we look at the work of Jordi Bernet over the course of time, from the years at Bruguera to the English period—the sixties with a central period devoted to the Belgian magazine *Spirou* (where he developed his system of spots in the style of Noel Sickles), the seventies with *Andrax*, the eighties with *Torpedo*—and see how the nineties arrive with the tortured but at the same time fresh graphics of *Ivanpiire*, we come to the conclusion that the whole of

Bernet's oeuvre is a journey into the essence, stripping his graphic discourse of everything outside his artistic personality and the most essential legacy of tradition.

Joan Junceda has often been compared to such well known illustrators as Arthur Rackham; before masterpieces of his like *L'illa del tresor* some historians have even wondered what heights Junceda's work would have reached if he hadn't limited himself so much to illustrating the charming but often mediocre stories of J.M. Folch i Torres. Jordi Bernet can rouse similar feelings in us. What heights would his work have reached if it hadn't been for the millstone of a frequently depressed industry in which the position of the illustrator is an extremely fragile one?

And again: will the day come when it will be possible to include Jordi Bernet as an important part of our culture (as Junceda himself is)? ■