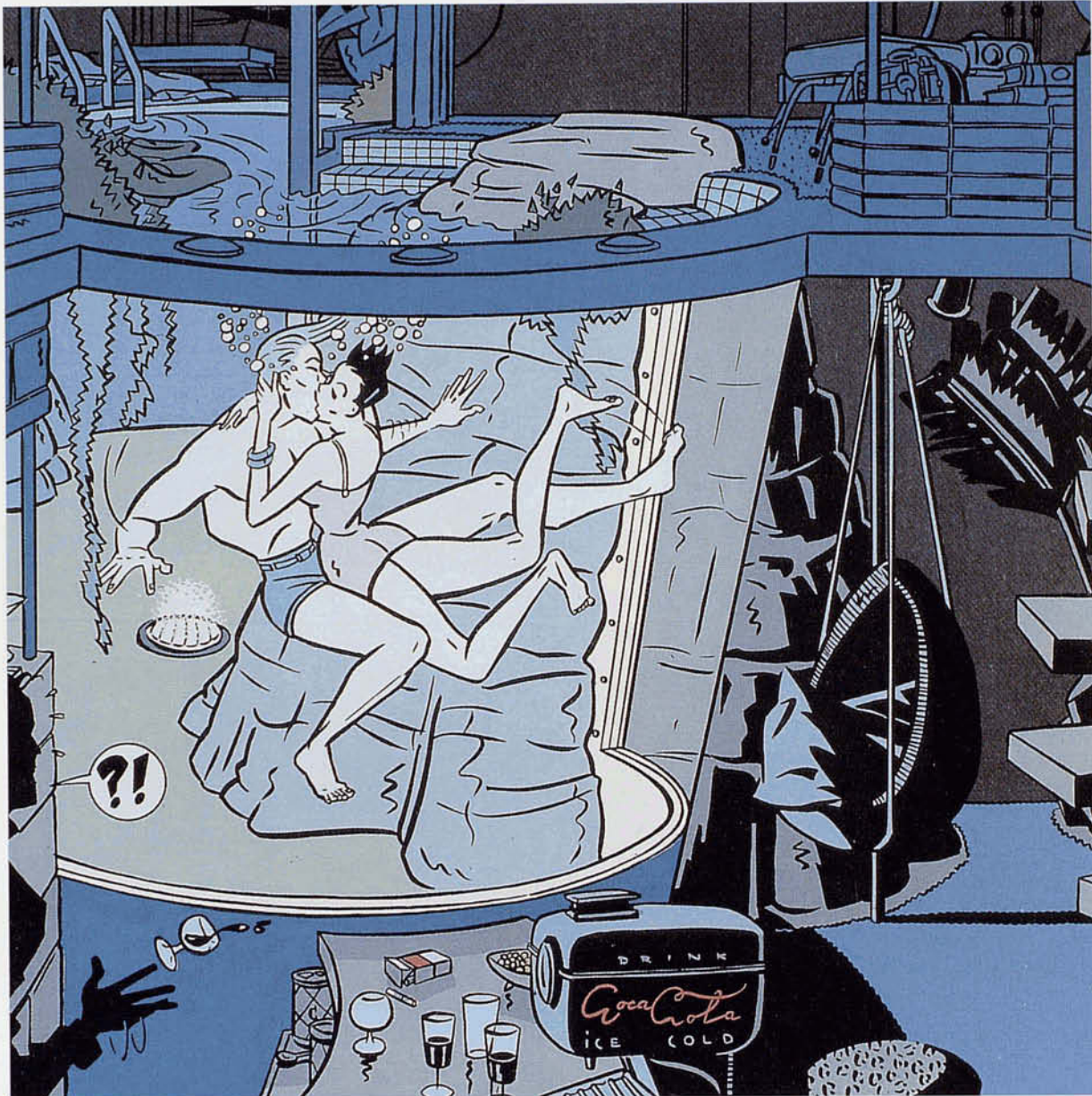


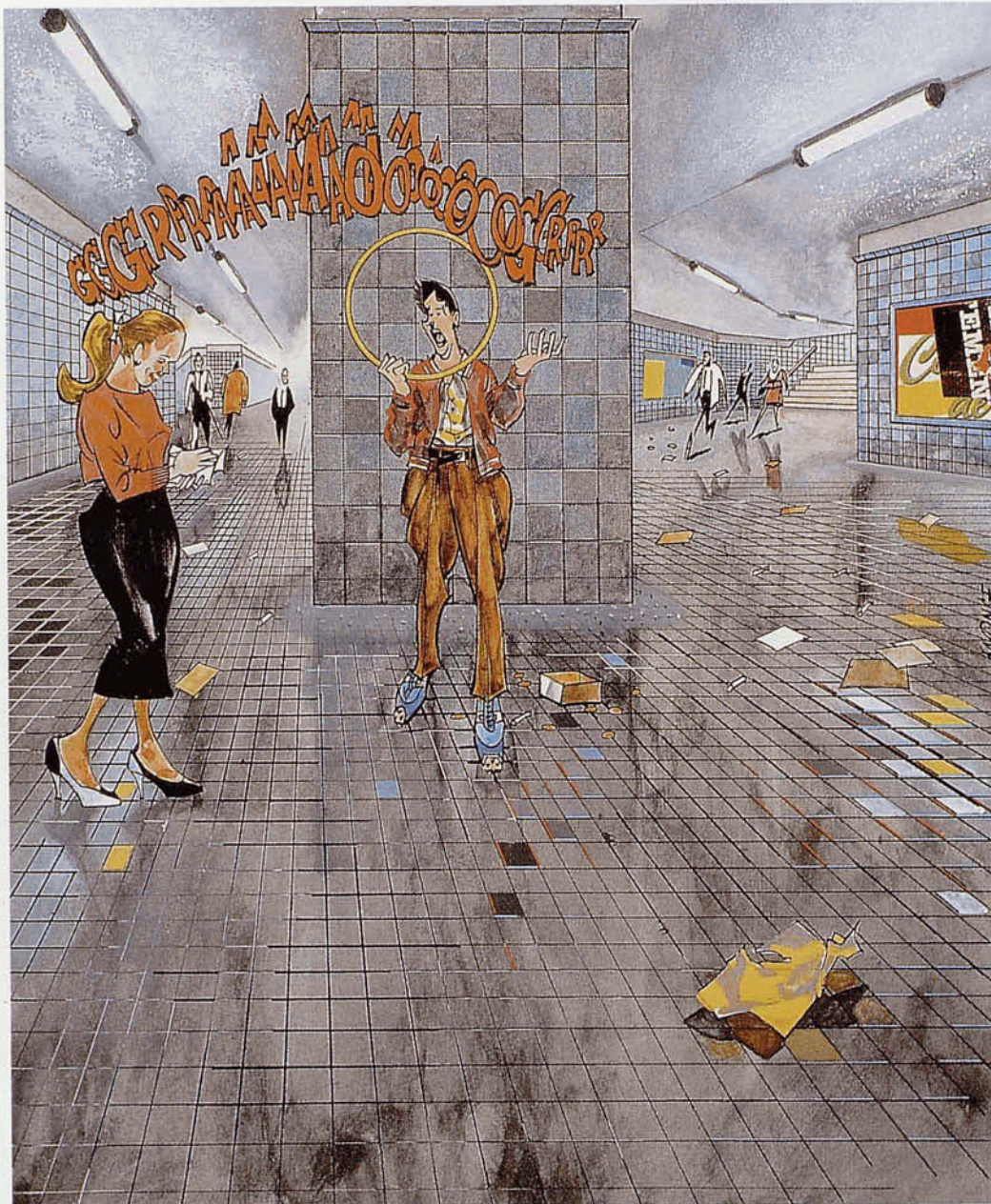
THE NEW COMIC STRIP



DANIEL TORRES. SABOTATGE. NORMA ED. BARCELONA, 1989

FROM AVANT-GARDE TO COMMUNICATION

JOAN BUFILL ART CRITIC



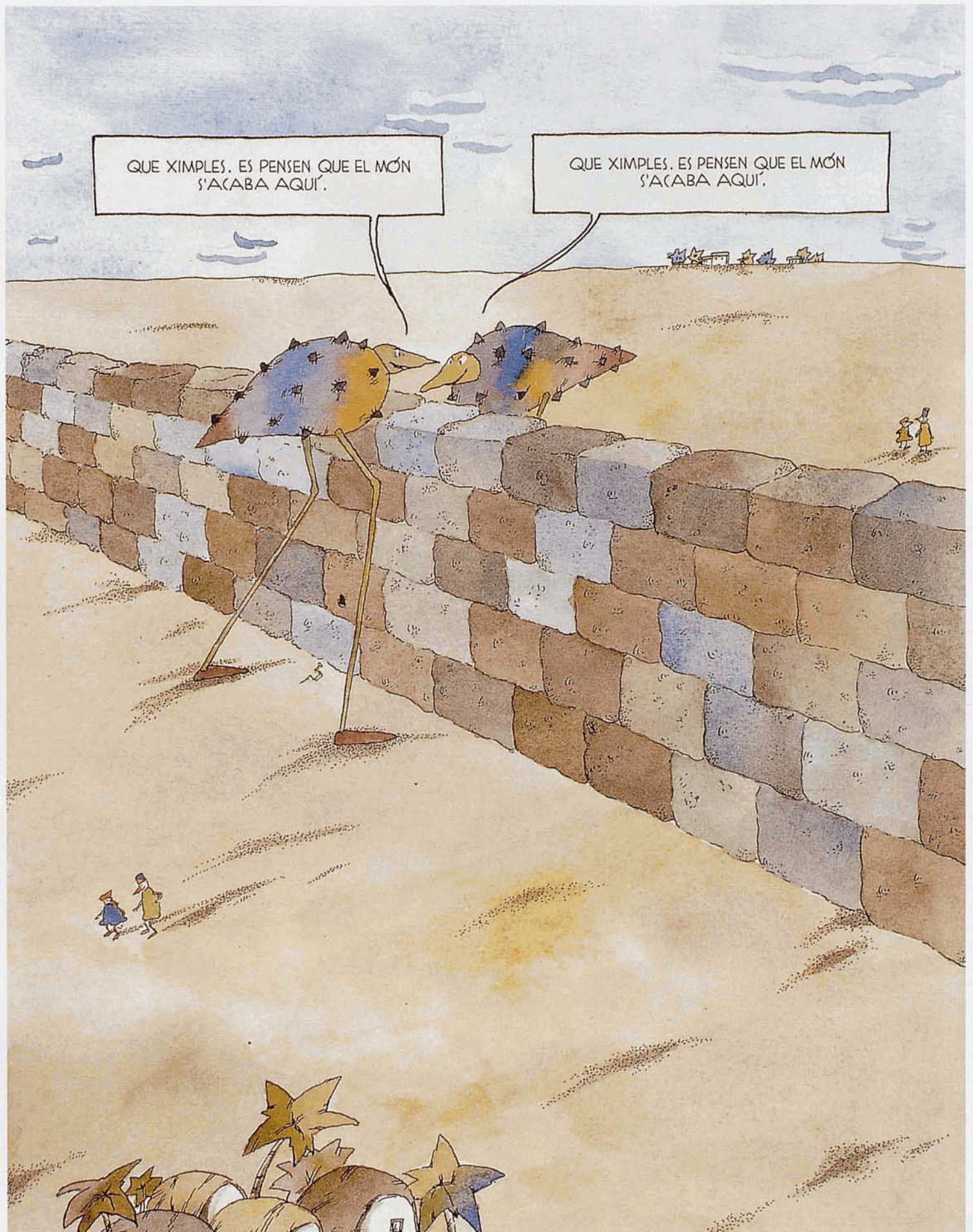
ANTONI CALONGE. EL VÍBORA, No. 108

The geography of the comic is unlike the geographies of the other arts. The countries that have excelled in this art, with its simultaneous involvement of drawing and narrative, can be counted on one's fingers. Leaving to one side the case of Japan, where print-runs reach the millions but where comics are looked on as a consumer good rather than as a form of artistic expression (even if at times that's what it is), we might say that Belgium,

France and the United States are the countries which have most often achieved a successful balance between the medium's artistic and commercial sides. Nevertheless, if we were to apply to the comic strip a criterion similar to that used in relation to contemporary art—where innovation and the avant-garde are valued above all else and no consideration is given to its popular repercussion—we would see that during the eighties a great deal of work was pub-

lished in Barcelona that was radically innovative in its form and content: work by Catalans like Max, Guillem Cifré, Martí Riera and Antoni Calonge, by Majorcans like Pere Joan and by Valencians like Micharmut, work that can be considered amongst the most original and valuable in the world in this medium.

This creative phenomenon—more than just a movement—has its own label, that of *Nueva Historieta* (New Comic Strip),



MARTA BALAGUER-DAVID CIRICI. EL PAÍS DELS VÒUCS. CAVALL FORT, No. 622



CARRATALÀ, DIARIO DE VIAJE POR ORIENTE (RAFAEL TOUS).

now with more than twenty years of history behind it which can be divided into three periods. The first period, of birth and growth, goes from the publication in 1973 of *El Rollo enmascarado* to the appearance of the first "post-underground" monthly magazine, *El Víbora*, in 1979. A second period of maturation brings us up to 1984, marked by the end of the magazine *Cairo*. And during the third period, lasting until today, the creative maturity of the writers and illustrators unfortu-

nately coincides with the financial difficulties of the publishers. This has caused the provisional or definitive desertion of many cartoonists and scriptwriters, to the benefit of other forms of communication such as design, book illustration, television, writing, painting, journalism, publicity or the theatre. In the last few years, we have gone from the premonition of a possible "golden age" to the unpleasant sensation that these artists might in the future come to be thought of as a

lost generation. But let's look at what they've done and what they're doing. Guillem Cifré has since 1976 devoted himself to transforming the everyday world to extremes worthy of the best surrealist art, without losing the immediacy and the freshness of the best humorous comic. His first black and white album, *Modernas y Profundas*, didn't appear until 1990. His splendid cartoon stories in colour have yet to be collected in an album and at present he is working



GUILLEM CIFRÉ. EL COLLAGE QUE CAYÓ DEL CIELO. EL VÍBORA, No. 64

UN CALIDO DÍA MÁS, LA MULTITUD RENUEVA SU GOZO EN EL DUDOSO CONFORT DEL CAO ARQUITECTÓNICO...



MIGUEL CALATAYUD. EL PROYECTO CICLOPE. ED. COMPILOT, BARCELONA, 1990



PERE JOAN. MI CABEZA BAJO EL MAR. OCTUBRE. ED. COMPILOT. BARCELONA, 1990

as an illustrator on *El Periódico de Catalunya*, always in the hope of being able some day to get back to comics.

Martí Riera, who with *Taxista* and *Terrorista* surpasses his master Chester Gould and with *Doctor Vértigo* achieved an unusual view inside a female mind tormented by male authoritarianism, is preparing a long new story for this year, after two years of little activity.

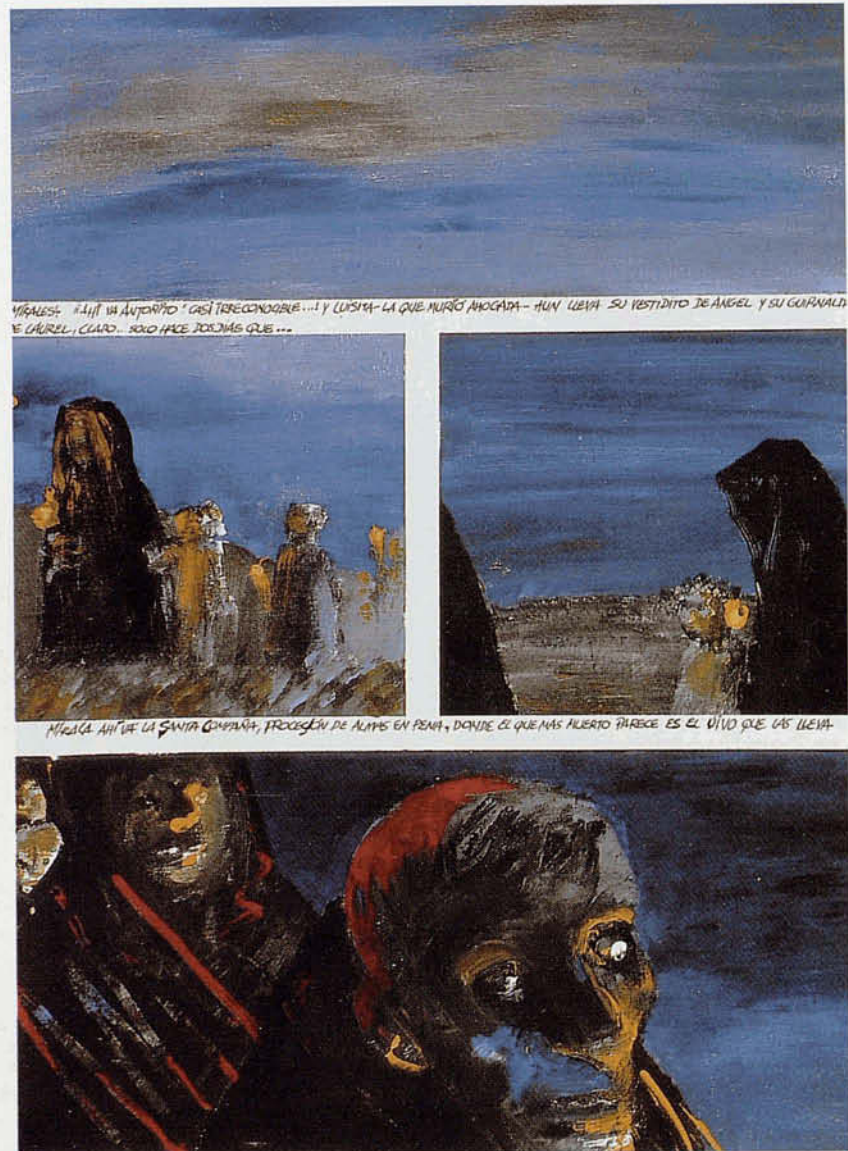
Max, inventor of new mythologies (*El beso secreto*) and creator of characters epitomizing their generation (*Gustavo* and *Peter Pank*), is working on a splendid story (I've read the script) called *El*



NAZARIO. ANARCOMA

mapa de la oscuridad, which, with its book format, is aimed at a broader—more cultured?—public than the usual comic.

In Valencia, Micharmut, chronicler of the exotic, infernal and repugnant modern world, refuses to climb down from his anticommunicative avant-gardism in work like *Futurama* or *Marisco*, although he hopes soon to find someone who will publish his highly individual hallucinations. Sento, who seemed destined for the role of ironic and elegant narrator of romances, has in recent years restricted himself to commissions like *Tirant lo Blanc*. Mique Beltrán is working on further adventures “suitable for all



DAS PASTORAS. LA SANTA COMPAÑA. MADRIZ, No. 25

audiences" of the wicked young *Marco Antonio* and his mother *Cleopatra*. Daniel Torres, author of *Las aventuras siderales de Roco Vargas*, is working on the continuation of *El octavo día*. And Miguel Calatayud is also still at his post. In Mallorca, Pere Joan, author of the splendid *Mi cabeza bajo el mar*, is preparing *La sonrisa del abismo* for this year, the first in an ambitious series of albums with regular characters, in which he hopes to combine innovation and commercialization.

The new comic strip also has other names on active service: illustrators such as Nazario, the creator of *Anarcoma*, who recently adapted *Turandot*; Rubén Pellejero, who has a place on the international market with *Las aventuras de Dieter Lumpen*; Gallardo, creator of *Makoki* and *El niño*, more and more visually orientated; Das Pastoras, and some new names such as Calpurnio,

Miquel Angel Martín, Anna Miralles, Tamayo, and scriptwriters like Ramón de España or the present author. On the other hand, illustrators such as Montesol, Carratalà, Saladrigas, Anna Juan, Tornasol, Roger and Marta Balaguer seem to have forgotten this medium. Vallès hasn't published anything recently, and neither have Damián or Diego. Mariscal is a case apart, as the adventures of *Cobi* are of a far lower standard than that of his more characteristic comic stories like the *Garriris* or *Julián*. As for Antoni Calonge, one of the most original illustrators, since 1988 a large part of his work still hasn't appeared in album form. Of what I've said so far, it would seem that the *Nueva Historieta* isn't going through its best moments. Nevertheless, it's also true that there is creative human material available to good publishers who know how to bring illustrators and scriptwriters together and want to manu-

facture products bearing in mind the potential public. One of the attractions of the *Nueva Historieta* is the freedom and spontaneity with which its creators have expressed themselves, but in terms of the market and viability, expressive worth isn't enough if the ability to communicate with a particular public doesn't go with it. A figure as distinguished as the Italian Lorenzo Mattoti said, just after visiting the exhibition "La Nueva Historieta", held at the Santa Mònica Art Centre in 1989 as part of the "Barcelona Comic Salon", that the comic in this country was the best in the world. Mattoti wasn't aware of the difference between Catalans and Valencians, but perhaps he was right. In fact, the comic strip is an art form in which the Països Catalans could play a leading role at world level. Let's just hope that these writers and artists eventually find the attentive audiences they deserve. ■



FERNANDO DE FEUPE. EL HOMBRE QUE RÍE. TOUTAIN ED. BARCELONA, 1992



CARLOS GIMÉNEZ, RAMBLA ARRIBA, RAMBLA ABAJO, EDICIONES DE LA TORRE, BARCELONA, 1986