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EDITORIAL

I can't get used to it

Whenever I enter a karstic valley I feel at home, confident, my guard is down. A dolina is a stream that disappears inside of the limestone ground, it is the green wall of the forest, an island, a closed universe. Not long ago I came across this same green filtering the light in the valleys of the Arieja. The woman who sold the tickets to visit the subterranean river had a moustache clearly visible on her upper lip, wore her blouse too low and, despite the cold, skipped around showing legs white as milk. Full of energy, like the Slovenian peasants, and equally as indifferent to her surroundings, she seemed interested only in counting the sold tickets and herding the visitors, like a flock, to the entrance of the cave.

The image of the bearded lady is strangely disagreeable, evoking a traveling circus where one pays to see the flame-thrower or contortionist. One of the few poets who have been translated from Slovenian to Catalan is Srečko Kosovel. In his poem "Circ Kludsky" (Kludsky Circus) he describes the fragility of a girl in the middle of the arena, in front of the stares swallowing her as if chewed by lions. This girl is Poetry because all of us who write are a bit like contortionists, jugglers, tightrope walkers—and why not, bearded ladies.

For me it would be easy to accept the role of a curiosity and feed into the exoticism of someone who writes in Catalan although originally from one of those ineffable countries in eastern Europe. I am what I write, I can't separate myself from it. But when you cannot hide yourself in any community, the exposure becomes painful. No one, in fact, shares your life trajectory. You are alone. And at the same time, you are as whole as if you had never left home. It is not possible to cut a person into pieces and separate the areas of their experience with a scalpel. If I share something with my adopted country it is the capacity to doubt, to analyze my own identity. This is why I have wanted to inscribe myself, with my own words, in a shared present.

I write from a completely personal position, I know. But the authors of this issue are united by Catalonia, not the fact of being foreigners. I don't want to position myself as a spokesperson for the foreign population. I ask you to read, then, each one of these voices in the singular.

SIMONA ŠKRABEC

ACTIONS & VOICES

Creative Interculturality

The incorporation of authors coming from other languages, whether foreigners or from the immigrant world, is a normal process in cultures favorable to diversity or those that are powerful enough to be attractive. This is the paradigmatic case of British or North American culture (including English-language Canadian culture), but also French, where authors such as Jonathan Littell or Marie NDiaye have won important prizes. That this phenomenon is reproduced in Catalan literature is more surprising, but authors like Matthew Tree or Najat el Hachmi confirm that this intercultural flux is also possible in cultures of smaller dimensions. Essayists such as the Argentine Patrícia Gabancho or the Slovakian Simona Skrabek, the American critic Sam Abrams, or the Czech novelist Monika Zgustova are other names that regularly nourish Catalan letters.

One explanation for these incorporations is the quality and profundity of Catalan literature, with a body of work that goes back a thousand years. Another is the fact that the position of this culture within Spain, where it does not have formal or political recognition outside of its strict territory, brings the writers a certain degree of commitment to the Catalan cause. But it is also true that Catalan culture is open to innovation and new creative forms, which makes it ductile and attractive. One only need mention an attempt such as *Serial Chicken*, the first novel written on Twitter and with the support of Google Maps, which tells the story of a chicken killed on the streets of Barcelona. The work, by journalist and writer Jordi Cervera, coincided with the celebration of the international festival BCNegra, which focused on detective fiction.

PATRÍCIA GABANCHO



INTERVIEW

MATTHEW TREE: THE INTENSITY OF EXPERIENCE

PATRÍCIA GABANCHO

Born in London in 1958, Matthew Tree has lived in Catalonia since 1984, after leaving behind an unconventional life with a large component of social protest, which he himself revisited in the volume *Memòries! 1974-1989*, published in 2004. He writes in English and Catalan. He has published novels that explore the human condition both familiar and strange, ironic essays about the reality surrounding him, or more serious ones on the great problems of human beings, such as God seen from the atheist point of view. Like any writer, he has an interesting life, and there are always autobiographical elements that add intensity to what he does, experiences, and writes.

It's quite unusual to find an Englishman writing in Catalan.

I learned Catalan without any intention of writing in this language. I learned it because I was living in Catalonia, in a small town, and the life around me was in Catalan. After six months I had interiorized the language. Years later, I discovered that I also thought in Catalan when it came time to write and that writing in Catalan I could free myself from a whole series of obstacles I had stumbled over when writing in English.

I wanted the flexibility of American English, in which you can “go from angels to dung” according to George Orwell’s phrase about Henry Miller’s style. In British English, to speak of the angels obliges you to use expressions that have a varnish of the upper-middle class and to speak of dung, to use what we might call workers’ phrases. A generalization, but more or less that’s the way it is. When I began my first text in Catalan, the feeling of freedom was instantaneous: with the foreign idiom, I could do whatever I wanted. Freedom!

Do you write in Catalan or in English depending on what you want to write about?

Years ago there was no division of labor between the two languages, but now there is. I began to write, whatever it was, only in Catalan. A novel, stories, a road-book set in Catalonia: ten years of writing in Catalan only. Afterwards I had an idea for a novel with English themes: the words came to me in English. I discovered that English had also turned into a half-foreign language, with which I could do what I liked. I now had my voice! Thus, I first wrote the novel (*Privilegiat*, *Privileged*, 2001) in English, later in my own Catalan version (and it was even translated into Spanish). From then on, ideas for fiction came to me in English. In English, inevitably, I have a bit of a wider margin in terms of my mastery of the vocabulary.

Do you write differently when you write non-fiction?

Not completely, since everything is creative writing, to put it one way. If you want to tell the intellectual history of racism in ten pages, for example, which I tried to do in my most recent book (*Negre de merda*, 2010), you have to take out superfluous sentences, choose adjectives, create expectation, exactly as if it were a fictional story. In non-fiction I’ve only worked in two genres: diatribe, which is a genre that lends itself to a certain literary manipulation; and personal essay, in which well-researched information and autobiographical elements can be mixed in a way that I personally find very satisfying.

Do you keep in mind that you’re writing for a more narrow market in Catalan?

Mentally, when you get to work, you are writing for everyone, even if you know that this “everyone” must have access to the language. You never ask yourself how many speakers there are in the language you are using. It would be absurd.

You have just published a book of essays entitled *Negre de merda*?

There’s a subtitle: *El racisme explicat als blancs* (Racism Explained to White People). It speaks, in general, of where racism comes from and what it is and what some of its consequences are, with concrete examples. There are two chapters that deal with how this issue is experienced in Catalonia (and concerning Catalonia, things are always *sui generis*).

In writing so intensely of experiences that might be universal but that have an immediate, personal component (this is one of your characteristics as a writer), you are able to make the reader look into a mirror.

I hold on to a phrase of William Burroughs that appears in a conversation he had with the painter Jasper Johns: the purpose of writing is to make it happen. If the last page leaves the reader in exactly the same condition as when beginning the first, we have failed.

The topic of racism also permeates the novel he has been working on for five years, *Snug*, written in English. The first paragraph, situated in a small town on the Isle of Wight in 1974, clearly shows the quality of Matthew Tree’s language. Somehow, in few words, he is able to get the reader to guess that terrible things have happened and will happen, and that an oppressive atmosphere will hover over the experience. He says: “This was back in the nineteen-seventies, when they didn’t have global communications systems of any kind—we civilians didn’t at any rate—no mobiles, no sat-navs, no internet, no bloody, bloody glib e-mail abbreviations like ASAP, no bloody, bloody snappy e-mail sign-offs such as “Best”. All we had then were telephones, some of them in our homes and some of them outdoors, in red steel-and-glass cabins that frequently whiffed of piss.”

ON POETRY

Brossa, Joan. Barcelona 1.19.1919 – 7.30.1998.

Born into a blue-collar family, he participated in the Spanish Civil War at 18 years old, where he began his poetic career. When he was in his forties, thanks to his acquaintance with J.V. Foix, Joan Miró and Joan Prats, he was introduced to surrealism. His first contacts and friendships were fundamentally artistic. He was the co-founder of the journal *Dau al Set* (The Seven-Spotted Dice, 1948) and collaborated assiduously with artists such as Joan Miró, Antoni Tàpies, Eduardo Chillida, and Frederic Amat, among others. In 1950, his poetry experienced a turn, thanks his acquaintance with the Brazilian poet João Cabral de Melo, with the book *Em va fer Joan Brossa* (Joan Brossa Made Me), where the intention was clearly political and the formal breakthrough was absolute. Brossa also manifested this political-social interest in odes, sonnets, and plays of a more traditional structure. This formal rupture brought him to a progressive conceptualization and synthesis, evident in the turning points of his 1960s books (*Poemes civils* [Civil Poems], *El saltamartí* [The Tumbler]), since they contained visual poems. This path led Brossa to the world of plastic arts (visual and object poems), but the method was, at base, the same that we find in many of his poems of an earlier stage (as in the prose piece “Kamir”): the contrast of distant realities, which produces in the audience a new, poetic and mysterious reality. Ultimately, this is a transformation of the world occasioned by a completely playful conception of poetry. As Brossa said in 1968: “If I couldn’t write, in moments of euphoria I would be a guerrilla fighter, and in moments of passivity, a conjurer. To be a poet encompasses both of these.”

KAMIR

Dues persones, que fa molts dies que no s’havien vist, es troben, s’enraonen i no es reconeixen fins després d’haver-se separat.
Dues persones, que fa molts mesos que no s’havien vist, es troben, es parlen i no es reconeixen fins després d’haver-se separat.

Un paraigua es compon d’un tros de tela cosit a unes barnilles d’acer articulades a la punta d’un bastó. ¿No heu vist mai llum en una casa ruïnosa?

Maig de 1949

From *Proses de carnaval*, in *Alfabet desbaratat*. Barcelona, Ed. Empúries, 1998, p. 26.

KAMIR

Two people, who had not seen each other for many days, meet, talk and do not recognise each other until after they have gone their separate ways. Two people, who had not seen each other for many months, meet, talk and do not recognise each other until after they have gone their separate ways.

An umbrella consists of a piece of fabric sewn to steel spokes articulated around the point of a stick. Have you never seen light in a house in ruins?

Maig de 1949

Translation by Julie Work. *Joan Brossa, desde Barcelona al nuevo mundo*. Barcelona, Institut Ramon Llull / Fundació Joan Brossa, 2005, p. 297.

Info about Joan Brossa:

<http://lletra.uoc.edu/ca/autor/joan-brossa>

<http://lletra.uoc.edu/especial/brossa/>

<http://www.pocio.cat/membres/GloriaBordons/brossa.htm>

<http://www.fundacio-joan-brossa.org/eng/inici.html>

Translated into English:

Poems from the Catalan (translated by Arthur Terry). Barcelona, Ed. La Polígrafa, 1973.

Four Postwar Catalan Poets (translated by David H. Rosenthal).

Minneapolis MN, *Cross-Cultural Review* no. 1, 1978.

1970-1995, *Twenty-five Years of Catalan Poetry* (translated by Arthur Terry & David H. Rosenthal). Barcelona, *Catalan Writing* num. 14 (October 1995), p. 14-20.

GLÒRIA BORDONS

WORK IN PROGRESS



Najat el Hachmi, Catalan writer born in 1979 in Nador (Morocco). Her debut in the world of literature came in 2004 with the work *Jo també sóc catalana* (I’m Catalan Too). Her second book, *L’últim patriarca* (The Last Patriarch), published in 2008, has been recognized with the Ramon Llull Prize of Catalan Letters. In this work, Najat presents the tensions and conflicts between the new generations of immigrants, already adapted to the country that has welcomed them, and the previous generation, still very much indebted to all that has been left behind.

I Am My Father

How handsome he is there, with a half smile, not being goofy. He’s so handsome that I would go for him all of the sudden. Well, I could do it, what I’d like best to do would be to contact you, skipping all the logical rules. What rules? I mean, WHAT rules? Is there some rule that says that you can eat my cunt, tear me inside because you wanted to rouse me to pleasure with your fingers, which were frantic when you put them inside me and I don’t know if I noticed or not your fingernails scraped off pieces of the moistest skin that I have on my body and then you not saying anything to me? And me not saying anything to you. Continuing on as if nothing had happened, as if we had shared a meal and that’s it, an afternoon and that’s it. As if some of your liquids hadn’t been inside of me somewhere, as if they hadn’t mixed with my liquids, as if I hadn’t seen a green bit of gunk coming out of your eyes just when you had your fingers inside of me and them looking at me with my face transformed more by excitement than pleasure, I wouldn’t say that at any time there was pleasure. I tell you this because I know what excitement without pleasure means, I know what it is that intense explosion that looks only for the edge and that, when it’s gone over the edge, becomes the most desolate of emotions. If I had orgasmed with you maybe I wouldn’t go for you now, I wouldn’t have you all under my skin and I wouldn’t go for you there. You’re too much like him, like my father, but in fact when I go for you I am my father. I am he who defies you and looks you deep in the eyes to tell you I can do what I like with you and ten thousand more because that’s what he did, he could do it with one woman and ten thousand more. Now he can’t any more, he’s too old. Like you can’t any more, but I still haven’t decided if it’s because you couldn’t or didn’t want to. You didn’t want to undress or you didn’t have time to do it or you had a hang-up about something or you’re impotent or you only wanted to look at me. Something told you to look, that you wanted to look at me and see how I shrieked, yes, you said shriek, while I masturbated. But before that you had said that you wanted to eat my cunt and a whole string of that word’s synonyms. Like I said, it wasn’t a long time, but all of those intimate contacts in fact seemed short and abrupt, even to a certain degree inhuman, grotesque. Remember the green gunk from your eyes that came out because of the sweat that already covered your whole face. But you didn’t disgust me because you’re him, my father and, as much as I’ve said that my father disgusts me, I am my father when I go for you, at least I was my father when I so urgently went after other men so they would push me to the edge I was talking about before. Yes, what I would like right now is to wring you out completely, to repeat the passion, was it passion?, of the other day until I had enough. But the most messed up part of all of this is that you haven’t called me I don’t know why, but I don’t call you because I know that in a little while I would be tired of you, that looking for your secret I would find something I don’t like to the point of not getting excited any more. Now you excite me because I don’t know what your secret is, but now that I’m beginning to glimpse it I think it will be a secret I’ll hate and that will make me hate myself for not having stopped before, for not having given in to you even though it was me who went for you. And tell me something, if I’m the one who goes for you, does that mean I have no right to withhold anything from you? Does it mean I can’t tell you you’re a disgusting pig, that it can’t be done? Since the first day when you hurt me and you tore me so much and the worst of it is you don’t call me or write me or say anything and you prefer to be with your paintings? Is that it? I don’t have the right to expect human behavior from you just because it was me who insisted on staying? I didn’t insist so much, you set a trap for me and I fell into it. You called me afterwards, but it doesn’t matter. I don’t have to ask for any explanations about why you called me. Even if you had made all the contacts I wouldn’t be able to demand that you call me or anything. Because it’s always that situation when you can’t do anything, when you don’t have the right to say anything and now I don’t know if I am my father for pride or my mother for submission but I know that your secret has something to do with me, that I can’t do anything and you are the one who enjoys all the rights.

PUBLISHING NEWS



Quim Monzó
Benzina (Gasoline)

Open Letter
Translated into English by Mary Ann Newman

It is always a celebration when a book is translated into English. In the Anglo-Saxon world, the publishing market only releases some three percent of translations. But the publishing house Open Letter desires to break this ceiling, motivated by the warning bell sounded by some writers, who have realized that this imbalance impoverishes them beyond measure. They have decided to publish *Benzina (Gasoline)*, a novel situated in the New York of the eighties and whose main character is Heribert, an artist at the peak of an arduously achieved fame. He faces crisis: creative, matrimonial, and sexual. *Benzina* was first published in 1983 and followed in 2005 a new version, completely revised by the author. The English translation is based on the 2005 edition. Why this complete revision? When Monzó wrote the novel, he himself has explained, he had not yet worked in press and radio. His experience with the communications media made him abandon affected and artificial words belonging to a language inherited from the middle of the twentieth century, and look for a model closer to that of the current reader. In addition, he changed the tense of the work from simple perfect to present.



Jaume Cabré
Viatge d'hivern (Winter Journey)

Swan Isle Press
Translated into English by Patricia Lunn

Since the 2007 Frankfurt Book Fair and the success achieved by *Les veus del Pamano (Voices from the Pamano)* in Germany, Jaume Cabré has not ceased to increase the number of his translations into various languages and to travel around promoting his books. Now he makes his debut in English with the delicious volume *Viatge d'hivern (Winter Journey)*, which was presented in Chicago, Providence and New York this past February. The stories that make up *Viatge d'hivern* are a literary homage to Schubert, Bach, and music, at the same time honoring painting, symbolized by Rembrandt. Cabré is a music lover, and plays violin as a hobby. For him music and literature are well connected: "The sense of rhythm," he says, "the musical sense that you acquire as a music lover make you get sharper when you sit down to write. In a certain way, the work of a composer and a writer are similar. I am one of those who read out loud, like Flaubert, especially when you see a fragment that isn't quite working, so then you sound it out. I find it very noble to appeal to the acoustic part of literature."



Anselm Turmeda
Disputa de l'ase (The Donkey Dispute)

LIT Verlag
Translated into German by Robert Beier

The writer Anselm Turmeda (Palma de Mallorca, 1355 - Tunis, 1423) entered the Franciscan order and studied in Bologna and Lleida. Later he converted to Islam and lived in Tunis under the name Allāh ibn 'Abd Allāh al-Targūman al-Mayūrqi. In 1417 Turmeda wrote the *Disputa de l'ase (The Donkey Dispute)*, a satiric work in which the author dialogues with a donkey about the superiority of man over animals. For its strong skeptical and antimonic component, the Inquisition put the work on its index of banned books. Certainly this is the reason why the original, written in Catalan, was lost. As a result this translation has been made from the only extant version, a French translation from 1544. This is the third volume of the *Katalanische Literatur des Mittelalters (Medieval Catalan Literature)* collection,

which began with the German version of the chivalric novel *Curial e Güelfa* and with an anthology of Ausiàs March's poems. The collection is the fruit of an agreement between the publishers Barcino and Lit Verlag.



Nouvelle Revue Française number 590
Special on Catalan poetry

Edited by Xavier Folch
Various translators

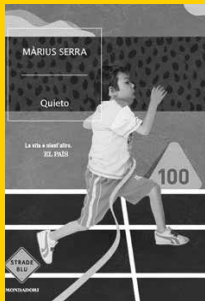
Volume number 590 of the prestigious journal *Nouvelle Revue Française*, published by Gallimard, and which last year celebrated the centenary of its creation, presents a special dossier dedicated to Catalan poetry. The editor Xavier Folch made the selections with the premise of offering works unpublished in French. The fourteen chosen poets are: Salvador Espriu translated by Bernard Lesfargues; Joan Vinyoli in the French version of Patrick Gifreu; Joan Brossa translated by Montserrat Prudon-Moral; Vicent Andrés Estellés in Jean-Marie Barberà's rendering; Jordi Sarsanedas translated by Annie Bats; Blai Bonet in a version of Jép Gouzy; Miquel Bauçà in the rendering of Patrick Gifreu; Narcís Comadira in a version of Denise Boyer and Bernard Lesfargues; Francesc Parcerisas translated by Annie Bats; Pere Gimferrer in the rendering of François-Michel Durazzo and Bernard Lesfargues; Enric Casasses translated by Patrick Gifreu; Maria-Mercè Marçal, Albert Roig and Andreu Vidal in versions by Annie Bats.



Joan Vinyoli
Y que el silencio quemé por los muertos (May Silence Burn for the Dead, a poetic anthology)

Pre-textos
Translated into Spanish by Carlos Marzal and Enric Sòria

Y que el silencio quemé por los muertos (May Silence Burn for the Dead) offers an anthology of the poetic work of Joan Vinyoli, the first monographic anthology of the Barcelonan author translated into Spanish published in the last ten years. The anthology, in a bilingual edition (Catalan-Spanish), includes a selection of the most important pieces of the following poetry collections by the author: *De vida i somni (On Life and Dreaming)*, *Les hores retrobades (The Rediscovered Hours)*, *El Callat (The Silent One)*, *Realitats (Realities)*, *Tot és ara i res (All Is Now and Nothing)*, *I encara les paraules (And Still the Words)*, *Ara que és tard (Now that It's Late)*, *Vent d'aram (Copper Wind)*, *Llibre d'amic (Book of the Friend)*, *Cants d'Abelone (Songs of Abelone)*, *El griu (The Griffin)*, *Cercles (Circles)*, *A hores petites (In the Small Hours)*, *Domini màgic (Magic Dominion)* and *Passeig d'aniversari (Birthday Stroll)*. Its publication closes the honorary events that were celebrated throughout 2009, with the motive of the 25th anniversary of the poet's death.



Màrius Serra
Quiet (Still)

Mondadori
Translated into Italian by Beatrice Parisi

The book finds its main character in Lluís Serra, or Llullu, the son of the author and a child affected by a multiform encephalopathy, as the doctors say. This cerebral illness means that Llullu cannot walk, laugh, speak: he cannot communicate. From behind the wheelchair in which he pushes his son, Màrius Serra was a privileged observer of the stares and paradoxes that were born around him. The book is made up of stories that are not chronologically ordered, about family situations that revolve around Llullu, until he turned seven. He does so without sentimentality, with tenderness, lucidity, and even humor, a difficult balance that

forms the best of literature. The author says: "Of course it is not fiction, but I use mechanisms of narrative, the same that I would use to write a story or a novel. At the same time, there is a clear aesthetic desire to establish a literary work. The power of literature is that it looks for ways to explain the world."

MONTSERRAT SERRA

LITERARY SOCIETY

Literature and Film: Paradoxes and Exceptions

Àngel Guimerà, Josep Maria de Sagarra, Mercè Rodoreda, Salvador Espriu and, in more recent times, Lluís-Anton Baulenas, Josep Maria Benet i Jornet and Sergi Belbel, are some of the Catalan authors who have been adapted in film through a contradictory and even paradoxical relationship. In the beginning, Catalan culture scorned the cinema and excluded it from the circle of other arts of greater tradition and prestige. The local cinematographic industry, reciprocally, did not offer guarantees of solvency that would dispel this suspicion and preferred populism to intellectualism. During the Franco era, Catalan literature and film were primarily countercultural or exceptions and only since the reinstatement of democracy have the circumstances necessary for an understanding been forged, which brings with it another contradiction: the involvement of the cinematographic avant-gardes is much greater with the plastic arts than with literature of a realist point of view. The filmography of Ventura Pons, on the contrary, is an example of coherence and fidelity when constructing a personal oeuvre based on Catalan texts, but it is an exception. The majority of new cinematographic auteurs opt for original scripts prior to adaptations of Jaume Cabré (*La teranyina, The Spiderweb*), Ferran Torrent (*L'illa de l'holandès, The Dutchman's Island*) or Emili Teixidor (*Pà negre, Black Bread*). Acquiring the rights of these makes the projects more expensive, and for the moment, does not guarantee that they can capture international markets. This is the point of view of the producers, but there are other factors to consider and authors to claim. Why, for example, has Josep Pla been the object of a modest television series of a biographical nature while none of his works have ever been adapted for the big screen?

ESTEVE RIAMBAU

ON LINE Digital initiatives

Visat. <http://www.visat.cat/>

An enormous website maintained by PEN Català, with sections on "Translations of Catalan literature," "World literature in Catalan," "History of literary translation," and a "Translators' space." Without a doubt, the best tool to underscore the importance of translation and translators. In Catalan, German, English, Spanish, and French.

bloQG: El quadern gris, una altra vegada (The Gray Notebook, Again). <http://elquaderngris.cat/blog/>

To commemorate ninety years since the writing of the most famous diary in Catalan literature, *El quadern gris*, by Josep Pla, a group on the internet has taken up its publication day by day, from March 8, 2008 to November 15, 2009 (with images, links, and commentaries). In Catalan.

Poetry videos. <http://vimeo.com/blocsdelletres/videos>

Josep Porcar, editor of Blocs de lletres (Literature Blogs, www.blocsdelletres.com), a web page of reference for the principal Catalan blogs about literature, has produced some sixty excellent video clips freely accessible on the internet, uniting image, audio and poetry (original version and translated) of great names such as Auden, Benn, Larkin, Leopardi, Rilke, Shakespeare, and Szyborska.

Combray. <http://combray.bloc.cat/>

The recent Catalan edition of *Combray*, by Marcel Proust (Vienna, 2009), under the direction of Josep M. Pinto, came out of a well-known blog in which, over the course of three years, the translator made available fragments of his work in process. In Catalan.

Joan Maragall. <http://www.joanmaragall.cat/>

Maragall is one of the great classic names of Catalan literature of the turn of the twentieth century. The "Joan Maragall Year" dedicated to celebrate the centenary of his death and 150 years since his birth, includes this institutional web site, which will present news of all the events, exhibitions and publications that are planned.

JAUME SUBIRANA