

It is hard to overestimate the importance of tourism in the recent history of Spain, and of Valencia in particular. Many forms of behaviour and discourse that still prevail today can only be understood in terms of the tourism boom that started in the 1950s, and its impact on not only the country's economy and territory, but also on its culture and identity.

Despite this, Spain's tourism boom tends to be trivialized. The dominant narrative reduces the tourist imaginary to the product that is consumed (sun and sand), the action of the government to a slogan ("Spain is different"), and the subjectivity of the local population to an erotic fantasy (Swedish girls). What this documentary exhibition proposes is a critical but unbiased analysis of the visual culture generated in the context of the boom within Valencia. The aim is twofold. On the one hand, it puts a spotlight on a collection of documents of undeniable interest to Spain's heritage: posters, brochures, magazines, postcards, guidebooks and travelogues, the majority of them from Valencian archives. At the same time, by providing clear evidence of the complex and contradictory multiplicity of representations, quests, desires and aspirations that converge in tourism, the images found in these documents allow us to take a fresh look at the story we have been told.

There are three areas to explore, always taking into account the different actors involved—from tourists to Francoist institutions by way of industry, and never forgetting the inhabitants of this changing territory. They are: tourism as a product, tourism as a quest, and tourism as transformation.

The Product

According to the anthropology of tourism, our compulsion to travel is fuelled by two major factors. One relates to the ego, and is founded on travel as the accumulation of symbolic capital (having travelled raises our status within our community of origin). The other concerns the search for happiness, which often takes the form of an escapist drive. In its most hedonistic form, this quest takes us to spaces—the beach, the all-inclusive resort—where, with everyday obligations on hold, we are able to attain a form of primordial freedom that closely resembles a return to childhood.

The Spanish boom falls into the latter category, following the "sun and sand tourism" formula associated with the growth of international tour operators. The economic recovery that followed the Second World War and the increase in the spending power of the working class, alongside advances in air travel and the drop in prices that came with package holidays, helped to radically democratize travel. The tourist product of the coasts of Alicante, Valencia and Castellón was to be shaped by international tour operators, who made the idea of low cost luxury one of their key selling points (good weather and beaches were taken as a given). Hence the countless advertising campaigns that encouraged people to "come and be spoilt" or to feel like "a king for a day", and hence, also, the ubiquity of the figure of the "servant". Brochures almost

invariably included images of a meticulously attired waiter serving cocktails at the poolside. The seductive power that such representations exerted over the imagination of some holidaymakers who, in many cases, were themselves “servants” in their own countries, should not be underestimated.

And while official institutions also appealed to this vision—with slogans such as “Spain, luxury within reach”—an attempt to raise the socioeconomic profile of potential tourists is also evident. Thus, in the posters and brochures produced by the Ministry of Information and Tourism (MIT), Valencian beaches were advertised not only through images of hotels with pools, as in tour operator catalogues, but also through opulent scenes with yachts and water sports (fig. 1). To create these promotional campaigns, which conveyed a modern and sophisticated image of the country, the Francoist tourist administration turned to figures such as Carlos Pérez Siquier, Francisco Ontañón and Ramón Masats, members of the AFAL group, who have become key names in the history of Spanish photography.

The homogenous nature of these representations is notable. The indistinguishable brochures dedicated to the Costa Blanca or the Costa del Azahar could be transposed to any other destination in the Mediterranean Basin. In the so-called “pleasure periphery”, national borders became blurred. However, the tendency of the tourism industry to standardize destinations should not lead us into simplistic preconceptions about the desires and expectations that motivated their customers. Regarded as the epitome of kitsch, postcards from the boom often in fact reflect a kind of pursuit of authentic experiences (fig. 2). Phenomena such as the sale of souvenir pottery or the popular donkey rides offered in locations near to the coast show that the subjectivity of tourists cannot be reduced to the low cost sun and sand product that they consume.

The Quest

“Harvest in the Garden of the Hesperides”. This was how the German photographer Bert Boger described the photograph he took in an orchard in Gandía (fig. 3) in his book *Rutas de España* (1955). The Hesperidean guardian nymphs might have morphed into an old man with a lined face, and the oranges carried by his donkey may not have bestowed immortality, but to the foreign visitor of the 1950s and 60s, the Valencian orchard was just as magical a place as the mythical garden. In countless books and travel guides, it is described as an idyllic environment of a benign nature, populated by happy peasants who lived in harmony with the land. This evocation of a southern European Eden reflects a constant that can be found at the very heart of tourism: the quest for authenticity.

Compared to the increasingly mechanized and consumerist societies from which Northern European tourists came, the geography of Spain was promoted as a world with a strong tie to cultural traditions. As well as satisfying foreign visitors’ expectations of authenticity, this suited the interests of Francoism,



1. Informational poster *Costa Blanca*. MIT, 1966
Biblioteca Valenciana Nicolau Primitiu. Collection Lluís Guarner



2. Postcard Callosa d'en Sarrià, Alicante. Daytrip in Fuentes Algar, 1968
Biblioteca IVAM

which was keen to channel ethnocultural diversity into the most inoffensive aspects of regional identities, such as gastronomy, folklore and vernacular architecture. This is demonstrated by the ubiquity of the Valencian *barraca* (a traditional pitched roof dwelling) in the promotional brochures published by the MIT during the 1960s, when these buildings were already in decline; or the dozens of tourist posters that focused on the Fallas, produced by photographers of the stature of Francesc Català-Roca, who, in his memoirs, recalled his trip to Valencia as one of the first he undertook after being commissioned to tour the country by the Ministry in 1959. This collaboration was to be decisive in the career of the photographer, regarded as a key figure in breathing new life into Spanish documentary photography.

Postcards published nationally, too, abounded with images of *falleras* in traditional costume, paellas and orange trees, staged with an artificiality that bordered on the comical (fig. 4). The conceptual convergence of tourism and oranges was particularly fertile within graphic design. It began to seep into such specifically local creations as the bunting that adorned streets during fiestas, or the iconic orange labels that decorated the boxes in which the citrus fruit was exported. Both an exotic fruit and a symbol of a healthy life, the orange also appeared on MIT promotional materials as an element of regional identity: the same orange groves that were being encroached on by the spread of tourism were used as a promotional image and even gave their name to the Costa del Azahar, or Orange Blossom Coast (fig. 5).

Yet, rather than the folkloric aspects that local authorities were so keen to promote, tourists searched out another sort of authenticity. In place of extras kitted out in regional dress, foreign guidebooks and magazines more commonly featured old-fashioned peasants using pre-industrial methods in their work. The Valencian Arcadia seemed to be incompatible with technological progress: were modern tractors to replace the smiling old people who led their donkeys across it, then the Garden of the Hesperides would be no more. The idea of the South as a backwater, which had first emerged in the eighteenth century, reappeared with new vigour in the context of modern tourism, driven by the search for primitive paradises. The Romantic stereotype, too, had also left its mark—leading, for example, to the focus on the orientalizing icon of the palm tree, and to the characterization of places such as Elche and Villajoyosa as a “slice of Africa in Europe”.

Although the glorification of backwardness was a side effect that was contrary to the regime’s interests, it is important to keep in mind the political capital to be made from the idea of authenticity. Ultimately, this kind of primitivist gaze functioned as a distraction from the country’s economic and social reality.

The Transformation

The impact that the so-called “Spanish tourism miracle” had on the whole region of Valencia is clear. As well as the boom in hotel construction, there

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3. Book by Bert Boger, *Rutas de España*
(interior page)
Ed. Dux, Barcelona, 1955
Biblioteca IVAM



4. Postcard *Paella in an orange grove*
Photo: Kolor-Zerkowitz
Ed. Durá, Valencia, 1964
Utopía collection



5. Information handout *Costa del Azahar*
MIT, 1966
Biblioteca Valenciana Nicolau Primitiu

was the offshoot of residential tourism, since buying a holiday home in the Mediterranean soon became another aspirational element of what was regarded as a desirable lifestyle. This is evident in the property-filled pages of newspapers aimed at foreigners in tourist regions.

But physical transformation wasn't limited to infrastructure directly linked to tourism. In fact, many of the urban projects carried out during this period bear the unmistakable stamp of tourism: after its late 1950s redesign, for example, Alicante's iconic *Esplanade* took on the appearance of a tropical maritime promenade, its serpentine paving becoming a new symbol of the city.

Beyond the physical marks left by tourism on the territory, there was a significant impact on the identity of the population. While international opinion increasingly criticised overcrowding and urban excess, domestically there was virtually unwavering celebration of the construction boom. Around 1970—shortly before *Der Spiegel* dedicated its cover to the “nightmare” that the Spanish holiday dream had become—a magazine titled “Alicante, la millor terra del món” (Alicante, the best land in the world) voiced the hope that the rest of the province would leave the past behind by following the example of Benidorm (fig. 6). The mentality of development had colonized the local psyche.

It's hard to believe that this optimistic vision referred to images that, to our eyes, seem dystopian. Think of the overcrowded beaches proudly shown on news reports and documentaries, or the postcards of beach resorts in which the sea is only just visible as a distant blue strip behind the buildings. Almost as if parodying such postcards, the cartoonist Mingote perched his signature vagrants above the Mediterranean skyline. Cartoons, in fact, were one of the few avenues for voices that were critical of the model of tourism development that had been adopted.

Exposed to the logic of the market as the only possibility, citizens learned to relate to their own territory through the eyes of the tourist. A telling sign of this is the wide acceptance of artificial labels such as “Costa Blanca”—an airline industry invention bestowed official status by the Register of Geotourism Designations created in 1964. The fact that publications more broadly, and not just those aimed at tourists, used these rather than more traditional cartographic names, indicates a form of acculturation. This “touristified” understanding of the territory shows that the values of the tourism industry had been internalized to the point of becoming an actual identity.

Images of hotels and urban developments also proliferated in the Spanish media. These not only celebrated the construction boom in the abstract, but identified specific architectural landmarks: hotels, restaurants, cinemas and even futuristic petrol stations that adopted—albeit somewhat freely—the architectural principles of the International Style (fig. 7). This was the so-called *Estilo del Relax* that lent a dazzling air to high-end projects, many of which have



6. Cover of the magazine *Alicante turismo 70* (supplement of *Información. El periódico de Alicante*), 1970
Biblioteca Valenciana Nicolau Primitiu



7. Postcard *Campoamor residential complex, Montepiedra Snack Bar*. Photo: Guirao Fotocolor Valman, Barcelona, 1964
Utopía Collection



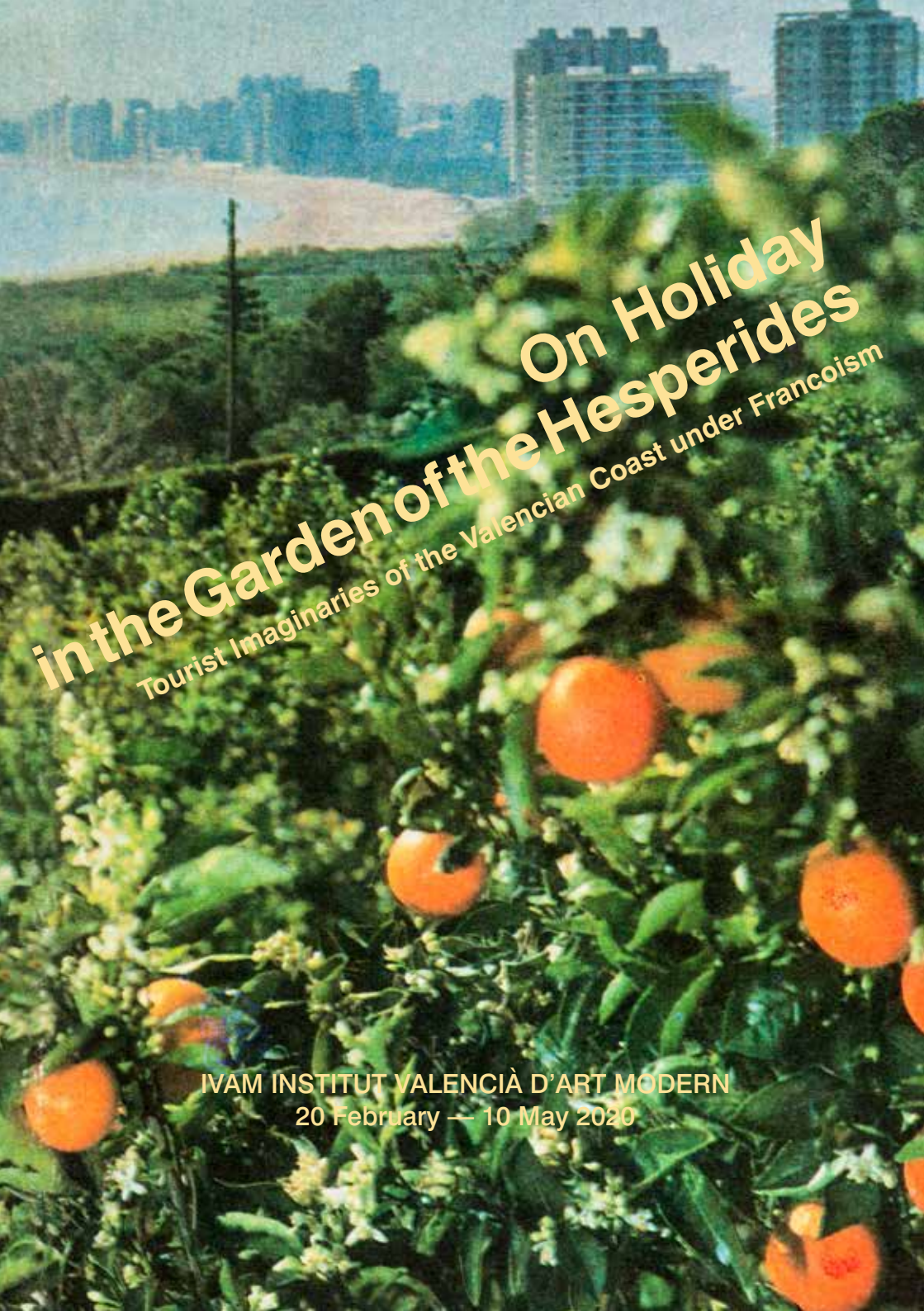
8. Fermín Garbayo *4th Benidorm Song Festival Benidorm: July 21, 22, 23, 1962*
Ed. Mateu Cromo, Madrid, 1962
Biblioteca Valenciana Nicolau Primitiu

since disappeared or are in a bad state of repair. These modern infrastructures became incorporated into the repertoire of local views, providing municipalities which frequently had no other heritage landmarks of note with architectural icons. In this way, those native to the country developed new ways of relating to the territory through tourism.

The exhibition closes with an archetypal example of this process: Benidorm. It is hard not to be swept along by the legendary charisma of the town's mayor Pedro Zaragoza Orts. Regarded as the architect of the "Benidorm phenomenon", which took off with the 1956 Urban Management Plan, his initiatives became internationally known: from his extravagant marketing campaigns (such as that which invited a family from Lapland to stroll around the streets of Benidorm), to the Benidorm Song Festival, where major figures as Raphael and Julio Iglesias first found fame. Posters with a naive aesthetic, such as that produced for the 1962 contest by Fermín Garbayo, a pioneer of graphic design in Spain, reflected the optimistic spirit of the age (fig. 8).

But beyond the individual actions of a mayor was the favourable attitude of a society that saw tourism as a way of moving into the future. Almost like a prototype Ibiza, in 1965 the magazine *Mundo Hispánico* described Benidorm as "the city where women chat up men and the prison is empty". This type of fantasy of an upside-down world sums up the virtues that were associated with tourism: freedom (interpreted as sexual openness) and economic prosperity (hence the empty prison, crime being unnecessary). Both elements sought out enthusiastic support for the tourism project from Francoism, contradicting the most common narrative, which focuses on the clash with traditional Catholic morality. In fact, tourism did not so much threaten the regime's foundations as provide it with a potent weapon of seduction.

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On Holiday in the Garden of the Hesperides

Tourist Imaginaries of the Valencian Coast under Francoism

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