

JOAN BROSSA POET OF REVOLT



Ajuntament de
Barcelona

EL BORN
CCM



Elegia al Che, 1967 (1971)

Col·lecció MACBA. Consorci MACBA.

Fons Joan Bronsa. Dipòsit Ajuntament de Barcelona

Foto: Gasull Fotografia

"If I could not write, in euphoric moments I would be a guerrilla fighter, in passive a conjurer. To be a poet includes both things."

Vivàrium, 1972



***Poema visual*, 1970 (1978)**

Col·lecció MACBA. Consorci MACBA.

Fons Joan Brossa. Dipòsit Ajuntament de Barcelona

Foto: Tony Coll

The social and political commitment of Joan Brossa (Barcelona, 1919-1998) to the Catalan and leftist cause is fully present throughout his work. A poet of memory, combat and revolt, with his use of humour, irony, parody and metaphor he transgressed conventional language and poetic forms, taking the work to the point of maximum simplification, to the limits of language.

Much of this poetic work, created during the Franco regime and written and produced subsequently, deals with social and political issues. There are a large number of texts, books and visual and object poems that are particularly critical of the political and religious power of the Franco regime. Joan Brossa rises up against totalitarian forms of language and makes criticism of language itself one of the essential themes of his poetry.

An overview of his biography and a selection of some of his literary and visual poems that are most representative of his critical approach to society give us an insight into his poetics of revolt. A map of the city showing the places where the poet left the imprint of his work is also a measure of the intimate, singular and creative relationship Brossa had with his city, Barcelona.

THE BATTLE OF THE SEGRE OR THE SECOND BIRTH

Bombs fall loudly.

I will not narrate the attack in detail.

On the beach there is a group of abandoned tanks we need to recover and numerous corpses laying in the open.

Our forces have taken many casualties on their approaching the river.

The injured are carried on stretchers.

Detonations and moans are heard.

Next to me the superintendent focuses his binoculars on a country house visible on the other side of the river.

The machinery open fire, the enemy locates the unloading and sharpen their target.

Mortar bombs fall nearby.

The bridge is full of impacts.

I am saved by a hair.

Down the river go the corpses and the remains of stepping stones and railings.

Every night the skirmish continues,
to rescue the tanks, with loses.

The mortars return to their deeds.

One night, around midnight,

I was born again.

I am alone surrounded

by sacks on a viewing point.

A voice shouts Joan.

I back up to the trench and, ensuring
there was not anyone there, fall

on the place where I just left a bomb
hat, in failing its fuse,

fills me with smoke and the smell of
roasting. My ears

whistle. After

I am moved, lying

on a stretcher,

and I look, as I can, upon the firmament.

(Like Wotan, wisdom

costs me an eye from my face.)

The following morning I think the bombing of the artillery continued interruptedly from daybreak.

A WELL-TRODDEN PATH (POSTWAR)

Mourning glasses, often. The bear from Madrid
Grunts behind a tree. What a cruel scheme
To deliver the stars tonight!
All the streets of an extreme neighbourhood

Hide amid the forest emerged
From inside the town, as a result of the theme
That I've heard from the deep kettledrums
Or promised myself to hear if the world burns

With such ill luck making hospital signs.
Light fights until the last streetlight.
Flag and music in vain. I scratch

The lazy boxes; failure has its weight.
Only the moon adopts an attitude
Of Baghdad on the landing of scales.

Fogall de sonets, 1943-1948

A WORKMAN PASSES BY

A workman passes by with his lunch pack.

There is a poor man sat upon the paves.

Two industrialists drink coffee
and reflect about trading.

State is a big word.

Em va fer Joan Brossa, 1950

A MAN SNEEZES

A man sneezes.

A car goes by.

A shopkeeper pulls down his metal shutter.

A woman goes by with a demijohn full of water.

I'm leaving to have a sleep.

That is all.

Em va fer Joan Brossa, 1950

A MAN HANDS OUT

The square, both for its buildings
and for the liveliness provided by its neighbours,
is one of the centres of the city.

A man hands out clandestine sheets.

In the Park there is a Swiss Mountain,
a Labyrinth, a Chinese Pavilion and a Greek Temple.

A man hands out clandestine sheets.

The street is tortuous and narrow;
it has a theatre, two cabarets and thirty cafés.

A man hands out clandestine sheets.

This building is destined
to become the offices of the factory
with a warehouse and a workshop.

A man hands out clandestine sheets.

There are workmen and students locked
and abandoned in a cell.

A man hands out clandestine sheets.

In order to visit the Ministers, Heads
of Administration and personalities of great distinction
you need to ask for a hearing in writing.

A man hands out clandestine sheets.

The church, despite not having a tower,
stands out from the other buildings on the street.

A man hands out clandestine sheets.

The servants come in to announce
that the banquet is served.

A man hands out clandestine sheets.

People without a house or shoes
live in caves, in the suburbs.

A man hands out clandestine sheets.

In a police station a gentleman wearing
a coat and a hat reports that

A man hands out clandestine sheets.

Poemes entre el zero i la terra, 1951

12TH OF MARCH 1951, AT 11AM

“At first the attempt was successful...”
(From the press)

The demonstration turns over
a tram and burns it.
They hand out leaflets
and make proclamations across Barcelona.

A demonstration
moves along crying out without rest.
The shops close. Yes,
down with the fascists!
The police are pelted with stones.
They throw cloths impregnated with gasoline
from the windows of the local government.
Another demonstration forms.
Men march along the street.
The explosions have ceased.

To the right, the impact of a bomb.

Poemes entre el zero i la terra, 1951

ILLUMINATED LEFT

Ah! Golden lights were dazzling me
Amidst the sights of misery!
I am thirsty. Expel the forge and the gust,
Cradle and grave.

An image, in the crystal, the forest might repeat.
A High Truth, breaks the ribbon that ties
Unhurried gestures at the point of fainting,
The alder, the stump.

Change my funerary shoe
For the white sandal at the peak.
I throw the mysterious juices upon the sand.
To the bread the date.

Let's put new harnesses on the mules,
Cone-shaped loaves we mix like the village;
Satisfactions might find themselves together,
Not in a symbolic group.

Let's empty lighting boxes against frontiers.
The wood from the heights has been cut;
Life will not be more than the life of the
Everyday.

All the flames are bound together in the fire,
Let's move forward, forward, tie the forces again.
To the loaf, which doesn't figure in any museum,
I pay tribute.

Odes rurals, 1951

THE SPANISH CATHOLIC CHURCH

I

Fucking leech, carrion on which the drain
Of the light of daytime ferments;
The opulent moon aims its rocket
And implores us, not missing its shot.

An unhurried spider weaves the soutanes.
How they dance with the many coming lives
Various as armies and servants!
They strip precious stones with their nails.

It acts as our mother and father, it fattens
On a mysterious darkness, and doesn't miss the chance
To blessing the prison bars of a grudge.

The biting good, evil in all of us—
That which you teach others—
Apply it, pig, to your yourself.

*These days society and nature undermine the violence of theocratic power; it's obvious that a new open and 'engaging' religiosity has been very useful in the evolution towards democracy.

Catalunya i selva, (1953-1954)

FRANCOIST SWINDLING OF FIVE POEMS

THE TRADE

...This General Administration of Information, at the proposal of the corresponding Service, has decided:

To resolve the aforesaid request, under the terms indicated in the enclosed sheet.

May God protect you for many years.

Madrid, 24th of February 1960.

THE ENCLOSED SHEET

Delete the poems in pages 33, 45, 60, 64, 70 (the sonnets suppressed in red), and submit a print of the galley proof.

Poemes civils, 1960

SPAIN 1960

The internal structure of the
Hermandad de Campeadores
Hispánicos is characterised
by an inflexible Authority
at its beginnings and soft
in its procedures, a
harmonic Hierarchy
in its essential and autonomous
in its secondary, and a
Christian Fraternity
in all... (*)

Yes, yes,
but I believe that the only
pedestals are the
shoes.

*Line originally written in Spanish.

Cau de poemes, 1960

CHARACTER

The trickiness of El Cid

The authoritarianism of Philip II

The imperial will of Charles V

And the arse and the voice of Isabella the Catholic.

Poemes civils, 1960

TUMBLER

For Lluís Solà

Doll
that has a
weight in its base and that,
tipped from its vertical
position, rights itself
again.

The people.

El saltamartí, 1963

THE 1ST OF MAY

For Xavier and Maria Dolors

The people: they pour down and soak into the battle,
windows like stars chasing the glow,
enough steps backwards, up with the revival!
let's go back to the first day of the revolt.
Tear up the silks and raise high the torches,
walk upright, walk, and beat the cry of darkness
with new fortunes; quiet the watchtowers,
breathe in new rain and burn all the coal.

The door of a new day unfolds in the shade,
don't run off route, your step will bring the loaf;
the ashes that bury you belong to another life,
winter will not lose us if we hold hands here.
Should a storm break over the den,
and thunder and lightning knock the gust off course,
answer the one who washes you off, end
the militarist night with a republican sun.

Gather spit and see how it dispels,
the revenge of the shadow will leave you aside;
set out for the walk, it's you who Catalonia sends:
light will create agreements and you will fly.
Oh, living sun, you, people, raise the flag,
with a huge ravaging ember become the first star,
shatter with a whip the goat in rags of combat
darkening the beaches since that July!

L'esmorzar a la muralla, 1968

THE SPANISH PRESS, IN EIGHT STORIES

1. Extraordinary success of an emission of 5,000 million pesetas in investment bonds.
2. Universal sensation and sympathy before the announcement of the Pope's trip.
3. Acclaimed important Portuguese-Spanish project to build a bridge over the Guadiana.
4. Loud failure of Khrushchev's agricultural project.
5. Czechoslovakia: Catastrophic situation for electricity production.
6. Malaga jubilantly welcomes the uncorrupted arm of Saint Teresa.
7. Gratitude of the North American people to Spain.
8. The youth has offered an honourable homage to the Army.

El cigne i l'oc, 1964

PRAISE

This winter a masterpiece of conceptual art
has been created in Spain:
the blowing up of the head of the government's car
with him inside.....

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20th December 1973

Els ulls de l'òliba, 1974

A BUILT REVOLUTION

For Guillem and Pilar

Those who lack it emphasise reason,
dust resounds over the construction,
and sea and earth show the junction
flipped over by blood and money.

Who exercises power: there's no need to beat
about the bush, fills its hat with confiture,
becomes an advocate of culture
and is utterly the first in everything.

Stanza, shout, forget gold and emblems!
Thinking oozes from these poems
and opens the wings to the vast horizon.

Beat with its birds all the problems
and spread out the certainty that we don't
need anything but the Revolution.

Flor de fletxa, 1969-1970

FINAL!

–You should have had another ending;
you deserved, hypocrite, a wall in
a different enclosure. Your dictatorship,
your fucking life as an assassin,

what a fire of blood! Rotten executioner,
should have beaten you up, the hard
darkness of the people, given to torture,
hung from a tree at the bottom of some path.

Rat of the worst delinquency,
you deserved another death with ferocity,
the end of so many since that July.

But you played the Spanish tyrant,
alone and hibernated, spit of science
and with a stench of blood and shit, Your Excremency!–

Glory of the puff,
the oldest European dictator has died.
A hug, love; and raise your glass.

20th November 1975

Antologia de poemas de revolta (1943-1978)

ELEGY

Salvador, for you there is no Amnesty;
any set of complaints is not enough;
but your thought, guerrilla cock,
will stitch up the light in the new day.

He makes me think, and this offering has
an eagerness to fight that leaves change;
your example, seam of happiness,
will give health to those who don't miss the street.

Freedom, column of fruit,
makes the day of the fight clear,
that gradually becomes vein.

A watch made of the people who fight,
you open the cage to mountains. You have not
fallen at all! Puig Antich, Salvador!

2nd March 1976

Antologia de poemes de revolta (1943-1978)

WORDS

To the poet Alain Misson

I have a language to explain fables
and name spells from mind and heart;
words made with sets of letters
which I then articulate with grammar.

With the structure of language intact
if one sentence is the foot, the other the hand;
things and names have a pact inside.
—Gentlemen, today I am not reaching behind.

Here is moon, sun, house, cistern;
here is shadow, sky, umbrella, river;
every word has its inner image
aside from the spittle from who says it.

I don't know if one day I will be able to write
the word as a word and a free object.

Sonets del vaitot, 1965-1966

THE CAGE OF LANGUAGE

Is the head of a man a tiny world?
How many worlds separate me from the image
of the world? The day is night or, rather,
the night is day? How many trees make a grove?

The image is the real or rather it misleads us?
Real illusion or false report?
My language no longer imitates the world,
but with free words it performs it.

Get out second-hand worlds! In the attempt
I pull out language's disguise.
Free the words, the mind's countryside!
Healthy wind, breeze, conceptual net

and the sea ahead! I think it's a bad trick
if the world is only an enlarged head.

Els ulls de l'òliba, 1974

BACCHIC

The order to cancel the carnival celebrations was made on the 3rd of February 1937, and it is still current.

(And a red demon
creeps out of the trapdoor
of the convent.)

El saltamartí, 1963

People don't realise the power they have:
a week-long general strike
would be enough for the economy to collapse,
paralyse the State and demonstrate that
the laws that they impose aren't necessary.

Askatasuna, 1969-1970

CLANDESTINE

–I leave you a brown suitcase,
and I assure you that you will find the requested
tools and the text of the announcement
that you have to make public within.
But the real insurrection is not that of those who take
the rifle, but the one that emerges
from the profundity of man.

La memòria encesa. Mosaic antològic, 1998

EPILOGUE

I know the usefulness of uselessness
And I have the riches of not wanting to be rich.

La memòria encesa. Mosaic antològic, 1998

CREDITS

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JOAN BROSSA

VISIT TIMES

Until the 31st of octubre: from tuesday to sunday and festives, 10 a.m. to 8 p.m.

From the 1st of november: from tuesday to saturday, 10 a.m. to 7 p.m.,
sunday and festives, 10 a.m. to 8 p.m.

El Born Centre de Cultura i Memòria

Plaça Comercial, 12. 08003
Barcelona. T. 93 256 68 51

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Program of complementary activities to the exhibition:

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