

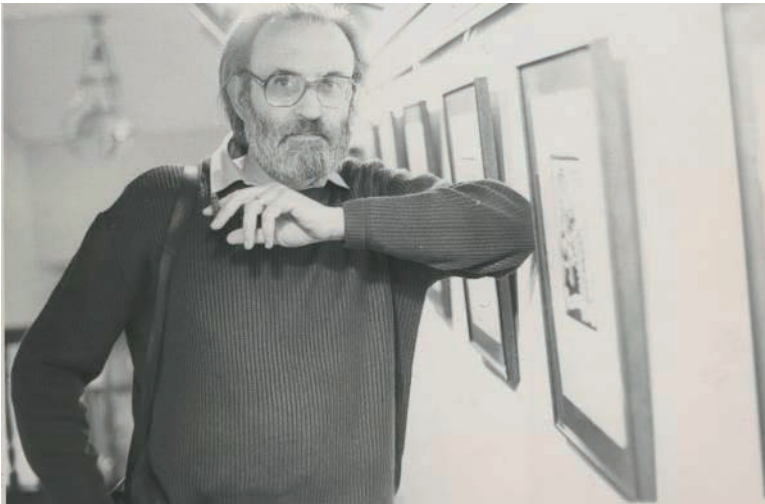


GIRONA · MUSEU D'HISTÒRIA DE LA CIUTAT

CARLES VIVÓ

A life of many paths

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The work of Carles Vivó i Siqués (Salt, 1930 - Girona, 2005) played a major role in promoting cultural life in Girona from the mid-1950s right into the early 21st century. Our journey through his wide range of activities reveals a unique, many-sided personality and a career that shunned conventionalism

and rigid disciplines, seeking rather to explore new languages and modes of expression. The figure of Carles Vivó is closely linked to his recovery of a universe of myths referring to the city, which were compiled in his book *Legends and Mysteries of Girona*. However, he also made a substantial contribution to energising other aspects of the city's social and cultural life through his life work which spanned a period of over fifty years.

In the 1950s, Carles Vivó was already exploring alternative forms of artistic creation in an attempt to break clear of the impoverished cultural scene and the stultifying atmosphere of the Franco regime. He cultivated the visual arts and also worked in close collaboration with the world of the theatre and the cinema. He forged links with various institutions in the city through various cultural events and interventions, ranging from organising lectures and exhibitions to working as an art critic and writer of articles and, in the more graphic aspect of his career, as a draughtsman and set designer. His position in favour of human rights and his friendship with the patriarch Lanza del Vasto brought him into contact with the postulates of the non-violence movement, which he was to defend and promote throughout his life.

The active presence of Carles Vivó can be traced in the Cercle Artístic, AFYC, Friends of the UNESCO, ADAG, Grup Proscenium, *Presència* magazine, *Revista de Girona* etc., and in many other institutions and initiatives committed to promoting the intellectual and cultural development of Girona city.

Legends, mysteries and other myths of Girona city

Introduction

Carles Vivó devoted many years of his life to collecting and researching local legends and traditions. Part of this body of work was published in 1989 by Girona Provincial Council in the collection “Quaderns” of *Revista de Girona*, under the title *Legends and Mysteries of Girona*. In one single volume, Vivó systematically compiled a set of forty legends about Girona based on historical documents and oral chronicles, thus bringing to light unusual, esoteric aspects of the city which had not previously attracted much scholarly attention.

With the recovery of an oral and written legacy which the passing of time had blurred and dispersed in many different documents, Carles Vivó made the city reappear in all its historical and cultural richness. Now into the fourth edition, the book has inevitably become a major work of reference, and has produced an upsurge of interest in local oral tradition, as seen from the plethora of guided visits, dramatised events, lectures, school workshops, books and articles on the subject of the legends, as well as a wide range of souvenirs such as legend-inspired sweets, chocolate flies, bookmarks, papier-mâché figures and so on.

Gerió

According to legend, Girona city was founded by a three-headed monster called Geriό. There are several different imaginary versions about this mythical figure and the creation of the city. In his epic poem *L'Atlàntida*, Jacint Verdaguer relates how the throne of Iberian King Tubal was usurped by Geriό, who then sought to murder the dethroned king's daughter Pirene, fearing that she would try to seize power over the realm. While Geriό was building the walls of Girona, the princess took refuge in the mountains to the north of the city. On discovering this, the monster set fire to her forest hiding place, thus causing her death. In honour of Pirene, the mountains were called the Pyrenees. Finally, Hercules avenged the princess by slaying Geriό.

Tarlà

The residents of Carrer Argenteria were being held in quarantine during an outbreak of the plague in Girona. During this period, a local character called Tarlà frolicked and performed acrobatics to keep the people entertained. After the quarantine was over, a wooden-headed puppet with a bag of sawdust as its body was dressed up in minstrel clothing in memory of the acrobat. Every year, on St Augustine's feast day at the end of August, the Tarlà puppet used to be suspended from a revolving rod spanning Carrer Argenteria. Nowadays, that particular feast day is no longer celebrated, but the tradition survives with the puppet being suspended from the same rod during the Spring festival, coinciding with the feast day of St George, patron saint of Catalonia.

Saint Narcissus

The story of the miracle of St Narcissus and the flies dates from the 13th century when the army of the French King Philip III (Philip the Bold) was laying siege to the city of Girona. In the course of the hostilities, the French soldiers profaned the tomb containing the incorrupt body of St Narcissus, the patron saint of Girona. Immediately, a swarm of giant flies flew out of the tomb, stinging the soldiers and the horses to death as a divine punishment for their evil act.

The patron saint of Girona is also attributed with other miracles such as those performed while visiting Augsburg, where he reformed a group of harlots, and tricked the devil into freeing the city from the clutches of a dragon. A huge literature exists on the miracles, some of which are immensely popular, such as the story of the apples which used to be placed inside St Narcissus' tomb on his feast day and thrown into the river after heavy rains in order to reduce the swell and avoid the predictable flooding of the city. Devout citizens of Girona are familiar with the tradition of curing earache with cotton wool which has been blessed on the saint's feast day; they also know about the healing properties of lamp oil which has been left burning beside the tomb of their patron saint.

The legend of the flies is firmly rooted in popular imagination, to such an extent that several different documents and deeds give meticulously detailed accounts of the nature of the insects in question. Carles Vivó's research led him to discover a wide variety of descriptions: large blue-and-green flies with fine red markings; standard-sized flies of many hues in which transparent blue always predominates; double-winged flies with different colours on their forewings and hindwings; flies with a sign of the cross on their thorax etc.

The Cocollona

This apocryphal contemporary legend originated when a nephew of photographer Emili Massanes made up the word "cocollona", a hybrid between the Catalan words "cocodril" (crocodile) and "papallona" (butterfly). The childish word inspired Dolors Codina, Emili Massanes and Carles Vivó to invent a legend about the transformation of a novice nun into an imaginary winged reptile. The popularity of the Cocollona legend has by now extended beyond the private sphere; the name has been used by restaurants, publishing houses and even a theatrical production, all of which has contributed to keeping the legend alive and well in Girona city.

In the Mercadal district, there used to be a convent of nuns who were not exactly a model of piety. However, there was one novice among them who did not wish to partake in the general high jinks. The other nuns kept her out of the way by locking her up in a damp underground cell. The novice stayed there for so long that the humidity made scales appear on her skin and she eventually turned into a crocodile. On the other hand, her purity and holiness made her grow butterfly wings. On full moon nights, the ghost of Cocollona can be seen swimming in the River Onyar.

Charlemagne

A popular fantasy tale of Girona's deliverance from Moorish rule narrates the miracle of how the Virgin Mary helped Charlemagne to shake off the Saracen yoke. On the evening of Holy Thursday, a huge burning cross appeared over the mosque and the Moorish king's palace in Girona; drops of blood rained over the city, trickling down over the roofs and streets until they formed a small cross of blood. The terrified Moors fled from Girona and Charlemagne marched into the city without waging battle.

The obsession with Charlemagne –who never actually set foot in the city- has given rise to a whole imagery (completely devoid of historical accuracy) surrounding the Emperor and the cathedral, which has gradually taken root in the citizens' collective memory. One example is the so-called Charlemagne Tower, part of the former Romanesque cathedral which was built long after the Emperor's lifetime. A polychrome alabaster figure by master sculptor Jaume Cascalls, believed by historians to represent King Peter IV, was also erroneously attributed to Charlemagne.

Charlemagne's Seat, an 11th-century bishop's throne oddly placed behind the main altar and partly hidden by the reredos, is another emblematic element in this group of legends. According to Carles Vivó, this particular spot has unusual underground vibrations. A legend says that if a couple sit there together they will be married within the year, but if a single man sits in the seat, he will never marry.

Saint Narcissus' housekeeper

This apocryphal legend was created by Girona poet Josep Tarrés, according to which a great-aunt of St Afra became housekeeper to St Narcissus when he came to live in Girona. She was a proud, striking-looking woman who was given to dressing flamboyantly. She was said to have magic powers and was also a fine cook, believed to have invented mint soup. According to the legend, the housekeeper, in an attack of rage, once filled all the churches of Girona with huge spiders and cobwebs. On another occasion, St Narcissus became angry with her and withdrew her powers, after which she was spurned by the citizens. Later, she had a vision in which she foresaw the tragic deaths of St Narcissus and St Felix. When her premonition came to pass, the housekeeper decided to practise humility and penitence, and spend the rest of her life caring for the destitute.

The cathedral: Introduction

Carles Vivó devoted the second part of Legends and Mysteries of Girona to the enigmas of the cathedral, of which he explored all the nooks and crannies: the cloister capitals, the angel on the bell tower, the fantasy bestiary and the keystones of the arches. The author pieced together a story full of subtle magical and esoteric interpretations, and hinted at traces of alchemy on several iconographical features of the cathedral easily overlooked by the non-initiated.

The musical cloister of the cathedral

In Legends and Mysteries of Girona, Carles Vivó includes the theory put forward by ethnomusicologist Marius Schneider in his book *El origen musical de los animales-símbolo en la mitología y la escultura antiguas* (The Musical Origin of Animal Symbols in Ancient Mythology and Sculpture). According to this theory, the cathedral cloister has a musical interpretation, in which each animal on the capitals represents one note of the pentagram. A Gregorian Stabat Mater Dolorosa can apparently be intoned by walking around the cloister and reading the capitals following Schneider's indications.

In front of the screen and behind the camera

Carles Vivó and the cinema

Throughout his life Carles Vivó was closely linked to the world of cinema and photography. His early interest in the language of cinema led him as a young man to try his hand at filming; he maintained this interest through his later involvement with Girona associations and institutions committed to understanding and popularising the world of film, with presentations and debates in film clubs and societies, and as an active member of the Girona Photography and Cinema Association (AFiCG), of which he became president in 1975. Carles Vivó also worked as assistant director on Antoni Varés' short film entitled *Roc* (1958) and played a minor role in *L'home del sac* (1960) by the same director. Later, with the Grup de Girona, he played the role of a priest in Jordi Lladó's film *Amor adolescente* (1966) and was the main actor in a short film by the same director entitled *Un laberint* (1970). Beyond the strictly artistic field, Vivó also played the main role of a priest in an advertisement for Domund Missions called *La llamada* (1963), directed by Joaquim Puigvert.



From actor to stage manager

Carles Vivó and the theatre

Carles Vivó's enormous charisma was patent in the field of theatre as much as that of cinema. During a period of cultural torpor, and at a time when professional drama was unsuccessful, Carles Vivó was an active, dynamic member of the various theatre scenes in the city. His love of amateur drama led him to act in different roles throughout his life, but behind the scenes he gave free rein to his creativity as a designer of sets and costumes and as a stage director. He also had a large collection of puppets, toy theatres and theatre posters. Some of these were his own creations, which he exhibited on many occasions. Vivó collaborated with various theatre and puppet companies, and his fascination with this world led him, together with artist Santi Roca Delpech, to organise an exhibition on the Catalan puppeteer Didó, coinciding with the 1983 Girona Festival. He maintained a close working relationship with the Girona-based Grup Proscenium, right from its beginnings, as witnessed by the wide range of shows in which he took part as an actor, stage manager or props designer.

Social and cultural commitment

Cultural activism

Carles Vivó's artistic and cultural career began in the mid 1950s with his first exhibitions held in the Cercle Artístic, on the Board of which he occupied different posts between 1953 and 1970. His early works were mainly pictorial, but his eagerness to study and experiment with new disciplines gradually brought him to other forms of artistic expression and new ways in which to explore the visual arts.

Indefatigable in his mission of shaking Girona society out of its deep lethargy, Vivó became a cultural agitator during the most hostile period of the Franco regime by founding and joining associations such as Grup Gàrgola and Grup Presència 65, organising lectures, courses, debates, and acting as a member of the jury for competitions. In one way or another, he was present at the most emblematic exhibitions held in Girona during the 1960s and 1970s. Over the years, Carles Vivó created artistic works impregnated with his own universe in which the esoteric mingled with a magical, dream-like world, sometimes imbued with a subtle, ironic gaze.

Vivó collaborated enthusiastically with all sorts of initiatives. His posters, illustrations and rhyming cartoon stories gave him a reputation as a sharp-eyed chronicler of the life and history of the city. However, his skill with the pen was not limited to the field of graphics: Carles Vivó also left a literary legacy including texts on art graphics, a collection of short stories, and the book *Legends and Mysteries of Girona*.

Carles Vivó's link with the non-violence movement grew out of his friendship in the early 1960s with Sicilian poet Lanza del Vasto, a disciple of Gandhi who founded the Community of the Ark in the south of France. Carles Vivó visited the community on numerous occasions and invited the patriarch to Girona to speak on his pacifist principles. He contributed to spreading Lanza del Vasto's message of non-violence through articles published in *Presència* magazine.

Throughout his life, Carles Vivó's interest in illustration also led him to design posters and rhyming cartoon stories, with which he chronicled the life of the city and helped to draw a map of the various events taking place in Girona. After the first poster, printed in 1958 on the occasion of the 3rd Provincial Flower Competition (the precursor of Girona Flower Time festival), there followed others on Girona Festival, the Holy Week procession, Poetry Night, Carnival Time, La Rambla Spring Festival, Girona Alphabet Cartoon, etc. His graphic work, far from the world of design and advertising, conferred a personal stamp on his posters which went beyond the strictly functional purpose of communication. Right from the start

of his artistic career, Carles Vivó showed a keen interest in calligraphy, to which he devoted more and more time towards the end of his life. In 2002, he put on an exhibition of his own work together with works by internationally renowned calligraphers, which was shown in Fontana d'Or.

Carles Vivó left his mark on the city. His commitment to Girona culture and society lives on in many fields, e.g., his posters and illustrations for different associations; his designs for the city's "Charlemagne" giant and "Anna Gironella" giantess; and Girona Penitentiary library which bears his name in recognition of the activities he organised there. Vivó's connection with many groups and associations in the city can still be felt, as in the case of Friends of the UNESCO in Girona.

