

Author

Jordi Benito's two overriding obsessions are, as anyone who has worked with him knows only too well, on the one hand, being an artist, and, on the other, not being an artist.

And this unusual contradiction—often a cause of suffering to him—has positive repercussions in his artistic work, which manages to escape the effects of any kind of voluntarism—usually such an ill-fated attitude in art. And for Benito, this gives rise to the need to indulge himself in his highly creative improvisations.

His reasons for wanting to be an artist are, quite simply, that he enjoys the work and that people expect it of him. And if, paradoxically, at the same time, he doesn't want to be an artist, it's because he's too intelligent and too intuitive to fall into the all too familiar trap—which can be innocent or more or less unconsciously opportunist—of thinking he's got things to say, or express.

Lucid, anything but naïve, Jordi Benito, like any great artist, knows that true art isn't born from the desire to create. As a result, he refuses to create artifice, which is what art consists of. Yet at the same time, seduced by art's own artifice, he desires it, he lives it, and he betrays it.

This is why his works are fragments of acts and scenarios from some impossible libretto, with opera understood as the great artifice of all genres.

And the third piece was in 1978, in Pobleta de Vellveí (in the Pallars Jussà). A group of us were on our way back from a little walk, when we saw a huge eagle dive headfirst toward a meadow and snatch up a rabbit in its claws. Then the great bird flew high up into the air and dropped its prey to the ground before coming down once more to take it away and eat it.

Then, Jordi Benito, almost without a word, peeled off his jacket, turned it inside out—it had a lining of something rather like sheepskin—and, putting it over his shoulders, he got down on all fours in the middle of the meadow, so that the eagle would think he was a sheep. Sure enough, before long the bird was back, circling over the meadow where Benito was crawling about on his knees with his hands on the ground. Suddenly, the monster grabbed the jacket, the artist clung

And an essential part of this unspeakably brilliant opera which is the sum of Benito's work, are the totally unplanned, spontaneous pieces which he carries out on the spot, as they come to him, in front of any audience—however involuntary—who happens to be lucky enough to be there.

Let me describe, briefly, three of Benito's most marvellous pieces, which are not to be found in any catalogue.

The first is an installation which he created one night in 1984 in Carç (a farmhouse in Puigmoltó, in the Garraf): the artist sleeping, with a wild pig tied beside him, in the same bed.

The second is a performance which took place in 1988, at the magical motor-racing track at Terramar (in Ribes, near el Vinyet de Sitges). We were walking along, with a little group of artists, and as we rounded a bend with a steep, almost vertical bank, "Jo Benito" (as he liked to be called then) suddenly tried to run up to the top. He didn't make it, so he had another go, and another, and then he took his shoes off, and he tried it yet again, and he tore his socks, and the soles of his feet started to bleed, until finally, just for a split second, he reached the top of the great bank. I've no doubt that, had the mythical conceptual performer Vitto Acconci seen it (even just in video or in a photograph), he would have wept for joy and Benito would have become his master.

to it with both hands, one in each pocket, and then the bird flew off, with the jacket and Benito underneath. After a few seconds, some five metres off the ground, Benito let go and fell on to a large pile of bales of straw. A few hundred metres away, his jacket came floating down out of the sky.

Fidel Castro was much struck by the story, which Jordi Benito himself told him when they met in Carmagüey (Cuba) last March. The Cuban leader suggested a more or less similar performance in the sea off the West Indies, possibly to take place next summer, using a shark. A video film will be made available.

An extensive (and, if possible, complete) list of Jordi Benito's uncatalogued work—carefully compiled and with each piece explained in detail—is a job which someone, sometime, will have to undertake.