

With an emphasis on the Welsh language, Culture or Identity chose a theme or focus on creative practitioners relevant to your field of study and critically analyze your choices.

Answering: "Actually, I am Catalan" when being asked if I'm Spanish, is a tricky and confusing thing to say to a nice person who's just asking because they are being polite. Catalonia is an autonomous community of Spain. Its historical territory was originally formed from the counties that formed the Marca Hispanica, in the northeast of the Iberian Peninsula, in the time of Charlemagne. Today, the term "Catalonia" refers primarily to the Autonomous Community of Catalonia and Northern Catalonia, which forms the Department of the Pyrenees in France. From the whole of Catalan history, I will talk about the Contemporary Period (1939 — present) and how graphic design has been an essential tool for maintaining Catalan identity in obscure times.

A whole series of historical constant conflicts and oppressions by the Spanish state towards all kinds of Catalan identities and cultures have been invoked in a state of persistent personal, political, and social conflict between Catalonia and Spain. Today, the anti-Spanish feeling persists in oppressed communities like the Basque Country (which suffered similar repercussions) and Catalonia.

Catalonia has had a working and anarchist identity since the late 18th and early 19th centuries, which has led to enormous revolutionary conflicts and scenes in the territory. The Modern Period (1808–1939) was the peak of the working-class movement and the industrial revolution. As the century turned into a new one, the Catalan wage movement had three important trends: syndicalism, socialism, and anarchism. These socio-political movements generated huge amounts of graphic and artistic content to communicate and announce different kinds of messages.

In the Contemporary Period, we stumble across Franco's dictatorship, the restoration of the compulsory monarchy, and the independence process with a lot of graphic supporting materials.

All of this is presented to contextualize my essay's subject, making this essay a research and analysis of the Catalanist graphic content created between the Modern Period and the Contemporary Period to combat Spanish fascism, keep alive the historical memory of the Països Catalans, and defend the identity of Catalonia. And so, the question to be answered with this essay would be: Has been Catalan graphic design (especially in the anarchist field) a tool of resistance and anti-fascist fight against Spain? And has it helped to preserve the historical memory and identity of the territory?

To answer this question, we must first understand the importance of the poster in Catalonia and Spain. The poster was one of the key propagandistic elements and collected all the modernity of the Soviet vanguard and commercial advertising. The major communicative production centers, Barcelona, Madrid, and Valencia, put all available resources in favor of the young republican democracy.

Unions such as the CNT and the UGT, political parties such as the PSOE, the POUM, or the PSUC, and institutions such as the Generalitat de Catalunya, or the Ministry of Propaganda created agencies and sections dedicated to propaganda strategy. Messages of revolution, wartime organization, and various political slogans had a common clamor, the fight against fascism. Those screams attached to the wall that filled squares and streets were also transformed into postcards, calendars, and illustrations in newspapers and magazines.

The Modern Period (1808–1939) defined Catalan Nationalism in the modern era, this essay though focuses on the Contemporary Period, an episode that witnessed dictatorships, the restoration of democracy, republics, monarchies, assemblies, militancy, and perseverance. All of these chapters in Spain and Catalonia's history have always been represented by artists and communicators,

those who wanted to speak out and reach out to be seen and be heard. Interestingly we can see how media, graphic design, and illustration have been used in totally different ways depending on the interested party.

At the beginning of the Contemporary Period, we found ourselves with the Franco dictatorship (1939–1975), a period defined by violence and oppression of all kinds. Specifically, Catalonia (Along with the Basque Country) saw the annulment of democratic liberties, the prohibition and persecution of parties, the rise of thoroughgoing censorship, and the banning of all leftist institutions. On top of that, artists and designers were under the influence of the new and popular European art movements: Surrealism, Cubism, and Realism.

So, the Spanish Civil War (1936–1939) acted as an agent of change for the political view of artists of the time. At the accelerated pace with which Catalan identity was being eliminated, most everyday actions and scenes took on enormous meaning. Clothing such as the “espardenyes” (typical shoe made of esparto), a symbol of the Catalan peasantry and working-class families since unmemorable times, was used as a protest tool.



“Aixafem el feixisme” (Destroy the fascism) (1) is a photographic war poster created in 1936 by Catalan photographer, publicist, and writer Pere Català i Pic. It was commissioned by the Commissariat de Propaganda of the Republican Government of Catalonia at the beginning of the Spanish Civil War.

Photographic pieces such as this were very pricey and hard to make so with the rise of the war and the need to be more efficient and reachable to everyone, printed posters gained popularity.

Figure 1. “Aixafem el feixisme”
(1936), Pere Català i Pic.

It is considered one of the best advertising photographs of the first half of the 20th century and one of the clearest political and graphic art messages of the anti-fascist resistance in this war era, even from World War II.

On the other hand, in the background, the blue working suit was the usual dress of workers of the War Industries Commission, which reinforces the political message and discursive pillar about the Catalan productive capacity during the war. In addition, the wet stones aim to highlight the urban tradition of worker revolts, present in other episodes of Catalan historiography.

Since the poster has widely recognizable symbols and does not refer to any particular political party, the message acquires purely visual rhetoric that allows it to detach from any text or motto. Its staging also fulfills the characteristics of an allegory. It contains a communicative capacity of great impact because it accomplishes, with great success and in a single black-and-white scene, to simplify the complex political situation with a message of resistance and an unequivocal enemy: fascism.



These kinds of displays were taken down and their creators were persecuted, but the republican press made sure those pieces were distributed. Some of the most typical posters at that time were the ones that aimed to recruit young men into the republican self-made army (Catalonia has never had an army yet there was and is a huge Spanish military force).

Figure 2. “LLIBERTAT! F.A.I.”

(1936-39), Carles Fontserè i Carrió

Carles Fontserè i Carrió was a poster artist born in Barcelona and exiled to France who died in Girona. During the Spanish Civil War, he excelled as a poster artist; he drew for the Generalitat's Commissariat de Propaganda and joined the International Brigades for the Republic.

In the last years of his life in exile in France, Mexico, and the United States, he was an active member of the Commission of Dignity, dedicated to demanding the return of the documents required of the Government of Catalonia by the Francoist army and deposited in Salamanca. Two months after his death he received a posthumous tribute to the Palau de la Generalitat.



This poster (2) is a perfect example of the typical republican graphic piece from the time. The color scheme was usually red, white, yellow, and black, as the Catalan flag (La Senyera) (3) has yellow and red in it, and Russian Constructivism was a huge influence on Catalan artists during that period. The color red has always been the color of Republican politics (and the color blue was for the fascists).

Figure 3. La Senyera de Catalunya.

“LLIBERTAT! F.A.I.” (4) is a flag made for the F.A.I. (Federació Anarquista Ibèrica) which translates to “Iberian Anarchist Federation”. As I wrote earlier in this essay, Catalonia has always had an enormous anarchist organization and ideology. Founded in 1927 through the newspaper “Tierra y Libertad” (Homeland and Freedom) with a very strong ideology of anarcho-syndicalism and a far-left political position.



The color of anarchism (black) with red, stands for an alliance against Spanish fascism as it showed the union of the F.A.I. with the C.N.T. (Confederación Nacional del Trabajo) “National Work Confederation”. As mentioned earlier, color schemes were very important given the low schooling among the population.

Figure 4. Union of the F.A.I. and the C.N.T. into a powerful yet simple symbol.

Anarchists played a very important role in the fight against the dictator during the Spanish Civil War. At the same time, a far-reaching social revolution spread throughout Spain, where land and factories were collectivized and controlled by the workers. All remaining social reforms ended in 1939 with the victory of Francisco Franco, who had thousands of anarchists executed, and those who were not had to be exiled. Resistance to his rule never entirely died, with resilient militants participating in acts of sabotage and other direct action after the war, and making several attempts on the ruler's life. Their legacy remains important to this day, particularly to anarchists who look at their achievements as a historical precedent of anarchism's validity.

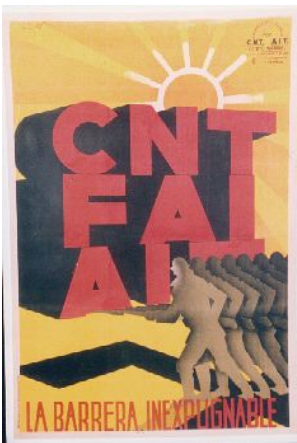


Figure 5. A C.N.T.-F.A.I. poster from the 1930s



Figure 6. Anarcha-feminist militia during the Spanish Revolution of 1936

At this point of the essay, we might be able to see that there are three big recurring themes in Spanish civil war graphic design: Very defined color schemes, big bold illustrations with sans serif typefaces, and the use of everyday elements to reassure Catalan working class identity through printed paper.

The outbreak of the Spanish Civil War in 1936 throttled the presence of Catalan design on the international stage and brought an end to industrial design, but not graphic design. It has often been said that the Civil War was a paper conflict because hundreds of publications of all kinds emerged: from mural newspapers, political publications, and posters to sophisticated well-edited magazines.

In this context, Barcelona becomes the main focus of a propaganda activity in which the poster acquires a leading role. It is in Barcelona that the first poster of the Civil War is created.

This being a poster created by Carles Fontseré (2), it is made for the “Sindicat de Dibuixants” just the day after the Francoist *coup d'état* (the 18th of July) and responds to the graffiti's desire to



commit to the Republican cause, fighting with a weapon they dominate: design.

The end of the war in April 1939 saw the disappearance of an excellent generation of designers. From this moment on, an anodic Francoist realism managed to assert itself in the plastic arts, preventing Spanish graphic design from becoming a world leader. The development and normalization of a stylistic innovation outlined during the 1930s were completely forgotten but its members remain present today through their works.

Figure 7. “MES HOMES! MES ARMES!
MES MUNICIONS!” (P.S.U.)

As part of the collective “Arte Libre de la Federación Anarquista Internacional de Barcelona” (Free Art of the International Anarchist Federation of Barcelona), unknown Camps and Els Barquets signed the revolutionary poster “MES HOMES! MES ARMES! MES MUNICIONS!” (7). An avant-garde and revolutionary exercise in composition, chromatic range, and typography.

It's very important to highlight that popular art par excellence, such as posters, is linked to an industrial process where there is no place for the concept of 'unique work': the creation of the original design is only one phase, not more important than any of the others that constitute the definitive finish of the product. It also has a necessarily massive recipient, the people who walk through the streets and stop briefly to look at the manifesto to take quick mental note of its images and slogans.



This poster (8) symbolized the unity of all pro-republican regional militias and ideologies against the fascists under one military command. As we can see, a soldier's head has different flags of regions of Spain, as well as the anarchist and Communist flags. From the beginning of the Civil War, it became clear that disunity was going to be one of the great problems of the Republican side, hence the call to fight the rebel army together. Finally, and sadly, unity never came about and each fought for his side for much of the fighting, being defeated as one would expect.

Figure 8. “Todas las milicias fundidas en el ejercito popular” (1936). Unknown.

With the same importance as the posters in the Spanish Civil War, it is worth mentioning all the women who fought fairly alongside the men on the Republican side (9). Unlike on the national side, on the Republican side, women took a very active part in the war effort, preparing all the necessary weapons or clothing they rule the War Business; On top of that, they fought alongside men to defeat the fascist side. On the poster, we can see a woman with her fist in the air clutching a hammer behind the three-pointed internationalist star and the factories behind them.



Figure 9. ¡PASO a la MUJER! (1937). Unknown.



Iconic photo (Figure 10) taken by Hans Gutmann is of Marina Ginestà at the top of Hotel Colón in Barcelona, on the 21 of July 1936.

Back to the main question in the essay: Has been Catalan graphic design (especially in the anarchist field) a tool of resistance and anti-fascist fight against Spain? And has it helped to preserve the historical memory and identity of the territory? Well, I find that, graphic design, specifically posters, have been an essential tool during the Contemporary Period in Spain, especially in Catalonia, but what is clear to me with this project is that the type of tool that these graphic pieces have been followed by very clear patterns: chromatic simplicity, sans serif typefaces because of their easy readability and above all, the use of quotidian elements as a symbol of protest and perseverance.

However, it is clear that the real fight was on the battlefield, with all the young volunteers and militants who sacrificed their lives for the anti-fascist cause, who shouted and fought for Catalan to be spoken in the street and for it to be taught in schools. They sacrificed themselves so that the traditions and culture of an oppressed nation did not become extinct. So, with pride and through the graphic resources that we conserve today, we remember and honor them daily.

“All the war propaganda, all the screaming and lies, and hatred comes invariably from people who are not fighting.”

- George Orwell, (Homage to Catalonia)

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