

Little Women of the Entire World, Unite!

Women authors of adult comics (1967-1993)

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Museo Reina Sofía, Nouvel Building, Library and Documentation Center, Space D

Monday to Friday, 9 am to 9 pm



Montse Clavé, illustration in *El viejo topo* [The Old Mole], no. 15, 1977

In the 1970s and 1980s, various Spanish women authors of adult comics revolutionized the medium by revising the approach to feminine representation in their comic strips. In confrontation with both the reigning idealism and the invisibility resulting from the social and political context of the time, these comic strip authors of disparate origin, proficiency and technique gave rise to a panorama of great stylistic and narrative diversity.

Under Franco's regime, the comic strip industry was aimed fundamentally at a female child readership through titles like *Mis chicas*, *Ardillita*, *Azucena* and *Florita*, which encouraged the interiorization of the ideology and values of the regime as regards the division of the sexes and what were meant to be the ideal attributes of each gender. Towards the end of the 1950s, there appeared some comics like *Mary noticias* (illustrated by Carmen Barberá) and *Lilian, azafata del aire*, both of which featured feminine characters who displayed a certain independence and worked in new professions (respectively, a reporter and an air hostess). Nevertheless, comics continued to present submission to men or the goal of marriage as aspirations for women.

Outside Spain, the feminist demands that arose in the mid-1960s were reflected in comic strips by some women authors, linked in many cases to underground movements and alternative channels of publication and distribution. Among the most outstanding examples, we might mention the American publications *It Ain't Me Babe* (spearheaded by Trina Robbins and Barbara "Willy" Mendes), *Wimmen's Comix* (published by a group of authoresses that included Melinda Gebbie, Roberta Gregory, and Trina Robbins), and *Tits & Clits* (directed by Lyn Chevly and Joyce Farmer). There were also some notable European publications, such as the British *Heroine* and *Sourcream* and the French *Ah! Nana*, whose contributors included authoresses like Nicole Claveloux and Chantal Montellier.

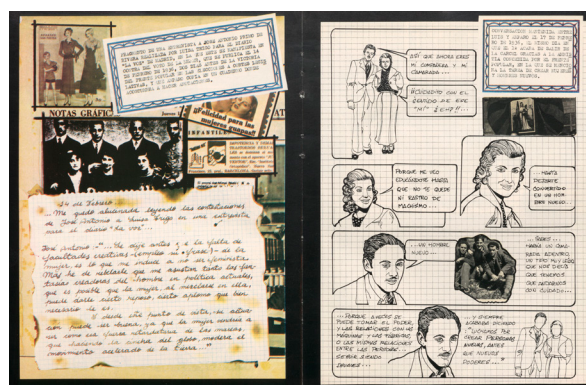
In Spain, the first exponent of the use of comics and illustration to vindicate the role of woman in society was Núria Pompeia (Núria Vilaplana Buixons), the pioneering articulator of militant activism in such work. Her production, developed principally through graphic humor and satirical cartoons in magazines like *Triunfo*, *Por favor* and *Vindicación feminista*, was characterized by a personal voice with a feminist focus. Through humor, she was able to broach issues like sexuality, abortion, pregnancy, university entrance, and social relations, always from a viewpoint that allowed other women, and the public in general, to empathize and connect with her message.

Despite this precedent, it was not until the end of the dictatorship that several women authors managed to make a niche for themselves in the world of adult comics. Among the cartoonists who then emerged were Rosa Lleida, Sara Presutto, and especially Montse Clavé, Isa Feu, Mariel Soria, and Marika Vila. Their appearance on news-stands was preceded by a number of difficulties, such as the need to attract a female public that had refused to read comics owing to their previous sexism, the reappropriation of feminine characters whose voices and bodies had been represented from a masculine and patriarchal perspective, and the retrieval of creative spaces to which they had been denied access.

Some of these women authors had begun their careers in the field of girls' comics. Nevertheless, they soon sought to steer their comic strips away from sexist canons, producing drawings with a predominantly combative attitude for



Núria Pompeia, *Mujercitas* [Little Women], 1975, n.p.



Marika Vila and Felipe Hernández Cava, *Dossier Amparo Torrego* [Amparo Torrego Dossier], 1979, n.p.



Marta García Guerrero, *Dolores, sus labores* [Dolores, Housewife], 1991, n.p.

stories replete with feminist vindications and socio-political denunciation.

After 1979, while the authors mentioned above were still active, there appeared a new generation that took full advantage of the inroads made by its predecessors. Among them were Marta Guerrero, Pilar Herrero Bendicho, Ana Juan, Mamen la del Café (Carmen Santos Castilla), Victoria Martos, Ana Miralles, Roser Oduber, and Laura Pérez Vernetti.

This new generation was characterized by a shift toward more ludic and festive contents. Although the defense of women's freedom and the unfettered treatment of sexuality still occupied a central place, these creations generally have a more hedonistic quality. The university education of many of these authoresses enabled a freer and more experimental aesthetic for their works, while their narratives touched on personal topics and concerns. Their contributions fell outside the realm of underground comics, since most of their work appeared in magazines produced by specialized publishers, such as *El víbora*, *Rambla*, and *Medios revueltos*, or even in publications brought out by public institutions, as was the case of *Madriz*.

In the late 1980s, Spanish comics entered a period of crisis owing to the confluence of various internal difficulties affecting the publishing sector, the consolidation of new forms of leisure, and the effects of a deep economic recession. This combination of factors led to the closure of many magazines and the migration of artists toward other professions. Despite such a desolate panorama, two collectively authored albums were published in the early 1990s that once again combatively denounced the problems of women. These albums, *Los derechos de la mujer* (The Rights of Woman, 1992) and *Cambio el polvo por el brillo* (I Turn Dust into Shine, 1993), were not a commercial success, but they helped to plant a seed that would blossom years later into the development of different critical movements driven by the field of illustration, such as the Wombastic platform (2014), and an increase in the number of women authors with a prominent place in the contemporary comic and graphic novel.

It is hoped that *Little Women of the Entire World, Unite! Women Authors of Adult Comics (1967-1993)* will help to draw wider attention to the work of all these women artists, emphasizing their contributions as scriptwriters or illustrators to major publications of the 1970s and 1980s. With their work, these women prepared the way for authoresses who today are able to broadcast their messages openly from a recognized position.



Laura Pérez Vernetti and Carlos Sampayo, *Ni de día ni de noche, sino todo lo contrario* [Neither by day nor by night, but just the opposite], 1988, n.p.

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