

A mirror of Gypsy Music

By Francis Marmande

Ariane Delacampagne will be exhibiting fifty-one medium-format prints, under the title of “FlamencoS”, in Nîmes, at the École Supérieure des Beaux-Arts, Hotel Rivet, until September 30th, 2005. She uses the legendary Leica M7 camera, mainly with a 28 mm lens but occasionally with a 50 mm, without flash or color. The prints are darkroom prints. “FlamencoS” is in the plural, for they are legion, like demons.

Ariane Delacampagne, born and educated in Beirut, chose not to photograph the “big names” of flamenco, and this lends a subdued strength to her work. Nothing is further from the spirit of flamenco than top forty charts. Flamenco is a culture, a science of poetry, and also, through its rhythm (compás), an arithmetic of nerves. Everything can speak of flamenco: a dance school in New York, in a tough neighborhood (am I really writing this?) of Queens or the Bronx, says as much about it as a *tablao* (is it a club? a cabaret?) in Madrid or Sevilla. The school of *baile* of San Fernando de la Isla, in the province of Cadiz, in a concrete housing project, has no grace whatsoever. Except that this where a neighbourhood kid who came to be known as Camarón de la Isla (José Monje Cruz, 1951-1992) studied. He was the second of eight children, born to Juana, who weaved baskets. He grew up in a family where everybody danced and sang without being a recognized artist. He became an alter ego to the guitarist Paco de Lucia, who was himself a most extraordinary gypsy, and rose to be the greatest in an art that eschews hits and charts.

No less flamenco in spirit is this photograph taken in Huê (Vietnam): the “flamenco” restaurant called *Serenade*, with a pedicab driver waiting in front of the door, a cigarette hanging out of the corner of his mouth, and two advertising parasols on the terrace. Yet there is also the workshop of the Condé brothers, illustrious guitar-makers; the dancing of wonderfully self-aware drunkards; an image that screams out at you; hands with bird-like knuckles; dresses and men’s pants that flatter the body; a cheerful celebration of the *culo* (the behind); José Molina’s studio in Manhattan, where Fred Astaire clearly did not stay long enough; the *buleria* school run by La Quijano, a woman who thought she knew it all and was admired by aficionados, until an old toothless Gypsy took her under his wing and taught her everything over from scratch in five years. Plus all the Sevilla *tablaos* distrusted by shrewd tourists who do not want to give away that they are tourists. Mirrors everywhere. Mirror of the scar, mirror of the studio, mirror of hands, mirror of the *culo*; the mirror, a poetic hope to be able to dance one day like the man in the mirror. One evening of 1993, El Torta, an immense artist in an art devoid of immensity, put on the manager’s motorcycle helmet at a club on Rue des Vignolles, in the 20th arrondissement of Paris. He sang *por seguiriya*, facing the mirror. A moment of pure magic: the warehouse on rue des Vignolles which housed the peña of *Flamenco en France* became the most flamenco-infused place in the world. Like Ariane Delacampagne’s black and white photographs, taken with a 28 mm lens.

Wherever they go, the Gypsies remain immigrants from within. In Andalusia, whenever they do not sing or dance, they get chased away. They did not create flamenco, they found it, filched it, with its Arab, Jewish, Black, Berber nuances, or the ionic modes of Byzantine liturgy that the Cordoban Church maintained until the 13th century. They claimed it, made it into this civilized scream, this tearing apart. They never prevented non-Gypsies from doing likewise and they waited for something to swoop down on them: *duende*, this demon, this genie that intervenes as it sees fit, and no one, no matter how skilled, can fake it or summon it.

Those stopped further north, in Alsace, in Belgium and in the greater Paris area are called the Manouches. They came from India or Egypt (whence the name Gypsies). At each stage, there was a graft, a musical larceny, a unique interpretation, personified, embodied, a sublimely fallen form of erudite forms, that came to be known as flamenco or Gypsy jazz.

Two Reinhardts, Mandino and Sony, launched on Monday, September 12th, at l'Européen, place Clichy, a series of six Gypsy nights. They are distant cousins of Django's (guitarists) but closely related to the Schmitt brothers (guitarists), Tchavolo and Dorado, who are also performing in the same series (on the 16th and 17th). Not to mention the two greatest violinists of our time, Pierre Blanchard and Florin Nicolescu. L'Européen is the most flamenco-filled auditorium, on Place Clichy. On Monday, the heat of the spotlights and bodies made Costel's violin and Sony's guitar explode in dramatic flourishes. When flamenco artists will be named Kevin, *duende* will have ceased to operate. All the CDs of the artists performing at L'Européen will be issued by Le Chant du Monde.

And finally, this news: two law-abiding poets just got slapped with a €3,000 euro fine for libel. The first because he told on his Web site of the beating in Montpellier of a poor wretch, thinking it was his business to get involved and refusing the prevailing look-the-other-way attitude. He was handcuffed and put in custody, and spent the night in prison. The second, because he recounted on his own site the misadventure of the first. They are Brice Petit, PhD, editor of a literary journal, and Jean-Michel Maulpoix, a university professor, poet and writer. The charges of contempt to policemen against them were dismissed, but they were fined for having broadcast testimony of police brutality. Was the poor wretch a Gypsy. That's beside the point. Poetry is going through a rough patch. The late Camarón, the Bronx and the night are well aware of it.

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