



The British Film Institute is screening a series of pictures that made it past the censors



The British Film Institute (BFI) is screening 21 Spanish films made under former dictator Francisco Franco that managed to outwit the regime's censors and present audiences with a critical view of society.

Spain (Un)Censored, which also ran at New York's MoMA last October, answers the question: Is it possible to make good films during a dictatorship? The film cycle, running until 17 February, shows how the period between the end of the Civil War and Franco's death not only produced several classics of the genre, but also served to develop the visual and oral language that would be used by subsequent Spanish filmmakers,\* as organisers explain.

Most of the titles on the programme were filmed between 1951 and 1976, when censorship was at its height. In addition to getting around the dictatorship's strict rules on morality, many of them even managed to obtain state subsidies. The cycle reveals the fluidness of the era and the high quality achieved by its filmmakers in such challenging and restrictive circumstances.

The titles being screened include Luis García Berlanga's *Bienvenido Mr Marshall* (Welcome Mr Marshall), Carlos Saura's *Los golfos* (The Delinquents), Luis Buñuel's *Viridiana*, Juan Antonio Bardem's *Muerte de un ciclista* (Death of a Cyclist) and Jaime de Armiñán's *My Dearest Señorita* (My Dearest Señorita).

One of the last films on the programme is Pilar Miró's *El crimen de Cuenca* (The Cuenca Crime), which, despite being filmed in 1980 – when Spain had made the transition to democracy – still landed its director before a military court, where she was unsuccessfully tried for defamation. The movie is based on real facts and tells the story of two men who were wrongfully accused of murdering a shepherd, before being tortured and jailed for six years.

Meanwhile, the Cervantes Institute in London will screen a selection of images from the *NO-DO*, the official cinema newsreels, which focused on the successes of the Franco regime. The cultural institution will also explore the period, its filmmakers and their films at a symposium on 19 January with guest speaker Paul Preston, of the London School of Economics.

A related book, *Breaking the code: Daring Films That Mocked the Regime in Spain*, with texts by Juan Antonio Pérez Millán, will go on sale as a complement to Spain (Un)Censored.

The show's commissioner, María Sánchez, told news agency EFE that the cinema movement emerged gradually in Spain without the director planning it. Each filmmaker developed a different language in order to avoid being censored, using irony, visual violence, double meanings and linguistic omissions. Everyone wanted to break the status quo in Spain, Sánchez explained, and had to deal with interference in their work, entire scenes of which were often cut out.

Even though the censors were ill-prepared for their job – they were priests and schoolteachers, who often banned harmless messages while letting more inflammatory ones through – many directors still could not make the kind of film they wanted.

"We usually don't think about the movies that were never made, which are many. That is why this retrospective is a tribute to the filmmakers who could not work," said Sánchez.

Spain (Un)Censored includes an exhibition of film material, such as movie scripts with whole sections scratched out by the censors.

According to Sánchez, this is the right moment to show these movies because Spain is currently "revisiting the past." The cycle will hopefully show in Paris and Asia soon, she said, so that Spaniards will understand the relevance of their own directors.

#### The highlights of the programme

By far the most famous film of this era is García Berlanga's *Bienvenido Mister Marshall* (Welcome Mr Marshall), a comedy about a small village that is preparing for the arrival of an American delegation, which unfortunately never comes. The movie is an ironic reference to the Marshall Plan, which brought economic relief to much of Europe but bypassed Spain altogether.

Luis Buñuel's *Viridiana* was a risky tale of a young woman about to become a nun and the visit she pays to her uncle, who tries to corrupt her. The strongly anticlerical film was originally banned in Spain but sailed away to France, where it won a Palme d'Or at the Cannes Film Festival.

*Los golfos* (The Delinquents) was Carlos Saura's first film, and by his own admission, the most difficult he ever made. Using street kids as actors, Saura wrote a tale about a gang of youngsters who react to crime in Franco one of their friend's dreams of becoming a bullfighter.

*Muerte de un ciclista* (Death of a Cyclist), by Juan Antonio Bardem – the uncle of Spanish actor Borja Velez Bardem – explores the touchy issue of adultery through the tale of a couple having an affair. When they accidentally hit a cyclist with their car, they fail to assist him, out of fear that their relationship will be made public.

*Mi querida señorita* (My Dearest Señorita), by Jaime de Armiñán, is the first foray into sexual orientation in a Spanish film. The story follows a 43-year-old spinster, Adela, who suddenly discovers that she is, in fact, a man. Although it caused a considerable scandal in Spain, the film was nominated for an Oscar in 1973.

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