

Some girls' parties

From Visual Arts to Music and Back

María José Belbel interviews the DJ, singer and artist Begoña Muñoz, one of the organisers of Soytomboi Projects.

María José Belbel: How was your experience at the Fine Arts College in Bilbao University, your move to the Netherlands and New York, and the making of your record?

Begoña Muñoz: I arrived at the Fine Arts School with lots of hopes because it meant being independent from my family. I imagined I was going to be at a creative, crazy and artistic place. It was disappointing. Once I finished school, I went to places like the Centre of Art Arteleku in Spain and found an enthusiastic atmosphere and the artist-friends-for-life I was still willing to find. Amsterdam was my most "professional" period. It secured my internationalisation as an artist, but I began to realise that I would not fit into the professional parts of the art world. I did not like the game although I liked the lifestyle: travelling and meeting interesting people. By that time I saw art like some kind of church; watching exhibitions was like going to a temple, going to lectures like listening to the preachers (so that we could all be sinners at the parties). My time at P.S.1 in New York was wonderful, and I met great people. When I returned to Bilbao, I started my music project with no special aim. It has taken me much further than what I could have expected; I released the album *We only move when something changes* (Subterfuge Records) in 2004. I work at the creative firm *funky projects* full time now - music and art have become more of a "hobby" because I have less time for that. I keep the same lifestyle though, and look for funding for my

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projects: videos, t-shirts, and tomboi parties. I have shows every now and then, mainly in Holland.

MJB: Could you tell us more about the album process?

Begoña Muñoz: Everything began like a performance, the kind of performance I used to do when manipulating the meaning of an artwork. In this case, I manipulated myself switching my position from art to music. The process with consonni - an art space in Bilbao who produced the work - was long and funny. We were pretty lost at the beginning. We began very naively, contacting people who would give us advice: some good, some crappy. Step by step, we built a product good enough to catch the attention of Subterfuge Records. In our first meeting, we made the deal.

I dedicated to making music exclusively for only two years, with touring, singing and DJing. The process of making songs was accepting that everything I could do was good enough - I had no idea about anything. I thought I could only give a little to the songs. Besides, I did not know that making music was such a collaborative effort. In the end, I realised that what I did was not ridiculous at all, but important. Now I hybridise music with the rest of my creative work: DJing, organising parties, art, design, enterprising with funky projects, and working on collaborations for other projects that I find interesting.

MJB: You work in different spaces, such as event organisation, networking and videos. Can you tell us more about that?

Begoña Muñoz: My dream is to organise something and be able to develop it. I want to create a feeling of community and

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make this community valuable in itself - a tool for collective and personal development. The Internet allows you to propel these structures rapidly. I need to be with people that are doers to make my ideas work; I need a team. I feel very free in all the different aspects of my work, I do things for no one in particular and for everyone in general. I think people can enjoy them and I can share the feeling.

MJB: Could you explain what the Soytomboi Project is about?

Begoña Muñoz: We are an independent and quite random group of girls doing something with the idea of partying: so self-expression and relationships could be bigger values than mere business - which is what happens most of the time when you go out. In most girls' parties, music is also too commercial. We decided to play music we liked but to add more layers to it. We forced ourselves to think about how to organise parties to make the night scene more fun. Soytomboi expands social networks, sends messages, creates a certain atmosphere in Bilbao, and changes the scene. We also use Tomboi to do whatever we feel like doing - there is no quality control on our projects. We have funny meetings to prepare and we like to take care of everything: posters, handmade flyers, videos, t-shirts, and planning unexpected events. We spread the word around and create social networks from online sites and in the streets. Soytomboi is a great party. We make it in our way - with a lesbian mind. We knew from the beginning that if we began something new it would be great; we knew people would be grateful, and we did not care if 30 or 300 people would show up. When we start thinking about throwing a new party, it is like: "okay, why not mess everything around?" We start thinking about stuff that would leave a trace for us

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and other people, the kind of things we would love to see or make. We always do what we think is important, meaningful and liberating for us. We do not intend it to be interesting or cool. We change all the time; we do not want to be stuck. Fortunately, we all have the same kind of spirit and none of us wants to be formulaic. We welcome new ideas in meetings - or when they suddenly happen at home. We all agree on what good music means for us. Music is very important in a party.

The dark side is that we are not very good organisers. We work on it very seriously; we want to become an association. None of us is 100% at Soytomboi and we have very different lives.

MJB: What is your relation to the context of your city, Bilbao?

Begoña Muñoz: There are amazing people in Bilbao with great projects. I am in relation with some of them but right now, I am more into what I create - I do not have extra time for anything else.

MJB: Once I heard about an early performance of yours, where you wore very high heels, like s/m boots - creating a friction between what people were expecting from you and the presentation you gave: serious and orthodox. In what way is your work feminist?

Begoña Muñoz: At this performance, I tried to generate a disconnection between what my body and my "brain" were communicating, with their respective exhibition. I could divide the audience into different groups: the ones that decided to pay attention to what I was saying; the ones that were looking at my boots and my movements; and the

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ones that were integrating both. I think the ones that were not integrating things in real time were putting me in a weak position. I talk about it now and it seems too serious but it was something like that. I used to need a conceptual structure to make my work. Now I am more intuitive.

MJB: You seem to work in a very free way, for pleasure.

Begoña Muñoz: Yes, but also from pain because when you want to achieve something, the fact that you are trying also implies pain; it can be hard, but when it is what you like, it does not hurt.

MJB: What nurtures your imaginary?

Begoña Muñoz: Intuitions, dreams, protest, and collaborations.

MJB: What is your opinion about the music industry? How do you manage to get funding?

Begoña Muñoz: I think the music industry is very wide and you can fit in any way that suits you. Besides, with new technologies and means of communication, you can even make your own industry. What is not interesting is when people tow the path and stop having an opinion on what they do. My famous big argument with the institution consonni was that, in the beginning, they wanted to make a star out of me and I was so against it!

MJB: Can you talk a little more about your collaborations?

Begoña Muñoz: I love collaborating with artists and technical people. Sharing a project makes it more fun. As I

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said before, I have this dream of making a long term collaboration that will become a "way of life" - the feeling of a community. With Jawata anti-DJ, who is also my girlfriend, we started DJing together. We met that way. We have been a creative couple from the very beginning; it could not work any other way. Little by little, Jawata developed her sense of the show side. Now I also enjoy her as a member of the audience. I am a big fan of what she does and the way she is. We are working together on an education project for kids; she is also a teacher.

MJB: Can you tell us about your collaboration with the artist Itziar Okariz for the video-clip Thanks?

Begoña Muñoz: I always wanted to work with Itziar. I love what she does and the way she develops her projects. While watching the French film *Les Demoiselles de Rochefort*, I had the idea of making a video at the suspension bridge of Portugalete, close to Bilbao. I proposed the idea to the institution *consonni*. With Itziar and Unai Goikolea, who I was working with at that time, we developed the idea of suspension as no-land, and the idea of rock idols being carried by the audience in live concerts. Friends shot the clip and the crowd was a mix of friends, fans, theatre students and curious people. The day and the result were great, but it did not pass the quality control of music marketing. When we sent the final edition to Subterfuge Records, they called to ask us if we were kidding them. My mother told me before, "The video is great but they will never show it on TV". I never really cared about Subterfuge's reaction - for me we made a great video. Then I collaborated with the artist Olaf Breuning. We called Olaf because we wanted him to make a portrait image for the album cover. The deal was that he would make a

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portrait of me and we would help make a big picture for his next show. I sent him a set of images for locations and he chose the pillars of Rontegi's bridge with that big painting with the peace sign. He liked my song let's play hippies the best. He sent a sketch of the composition with lots of people inside adding this great sentence, "we only move when something changes". I called friends to be part of the picture. We all had a great time; we looked like something in-between Albanian refugees with wigs and a Californian sect. Just to glance at each other was a big laugh. The picture of the cover is not really in relation to the music on the CD; you cannot tell, but the sentence WOMWSC (we only move when something changes) was so right in relation to the feeling we had making the project. The truth was that the project was only possible because we took some risks.

MJB: What are your musical tastes for sounds produced by women, queers, trans artists and different contexts and spaces in Spain?

Begoña Muñoz: In Spain, I prefer women who have made their own music, or bands where women are not only the female voice and there is more improvisation and spontaneity. I know a lot of bands and structures through myspace. Right now I am listening to Espía de la CIA from Voyeur Destroyeur, we have invited them to one of our parties. I have a soft spot for women's music. I usually expect it to be more surprising and usually it is like that. I saw Coco Rosie play; it is as if you hear and watch something totally new. I kept my mouth open and almost fell down from the theater box.

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MJB: Is there a movement or tendency that has influenced or interested you?

Begoña Muñoz: I like when things are fast and dirty. You think something, you have an idea or impulse, and you do it with the tools that you have. The whole thing can be very complex in the end but I like the expression of things when there is no manipulation involved.

MJB: Which international projects interest you?

Begoña Muñoz: Publications like GLU (Girls like Us) and other fanzines. They are a source of information that allows you to know the projects and the lives of other creative women.

MJB: Where is the intersection between visual art and music leading you?

Begoña Muñoz: I do not know... I think the direction is good. What I have to improve is not creating stress, but to enjoy and value it better.

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