
MICE ON MARS

SPANISH DUO **TWEE MUIZEN** BLENDS FASHION, ART AND DESIGN TO CREATE SUPERSIZED MURALS, STRANGE MASKS AND FRIENDLY TAXIDERMY. PREPARE TO DIVE INTO A WORLD OF POP SURREALISM

TWEE MUIZEN is made up of fine artist Denís Galocha and fashion designer Cristina Barrientos, a creative duo from Spain. They run a workshop and gallery from Barcelona, where they're based.

www.instagram.com/tweemuizen

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Fine artist Denis Galocha and fashion designer Cristina Barrientos are the creative duo (and real-life couple) known as Twee Muizen. They hail from Spain, but they picked up their studio name – Dutch for ‘two mice’ – during a stint in Amsterdam.

Now the mice are back on home turf, collaborating with clients worldwide from their combined studio/gallery space in Barcelona. The duo were a standout appearance at this year's Pictoplasma festival in Berlin. We caught up with them afterwards to find out about their story, including why they wish they'd thought their studio name through a little more.

Tell us a bit about your history

Cristina Barrientos: We are both from the countryside of Galicia, in the north of Spain. While studying I used to work the weekends in a small bar. That was the first time we saw each other, and since 2008 we've been together.

Denís Galocha: Once we had finished our studies we moved to Amsterdam. It was nice, but we never got used to the hard winters! The last year we were living there, I suggested Cris should make some of the characters that I was drawing, using textiles. The result was Giterij (named after our street at that time). This art toy was the seed of the whole collaboration.

Your studio name means ‘two mice’ in Dutch. How did you choose it?

Barrientos: This is a bit corny, and if we had thought that some day we would be asked in an interview why Twee Muizen is our artistic name, I don't know if we would have chosen it! But yes, we are two mice.

In the first years of our relationship we started to call each other ‘mouse’. Our friends started to

refer to us as ‘the mice’. We lost our names and became ‘los ratones’.

Galocha: When we started working together it was a hobby for a long time – we never thought this would be our life. For our first exhibitions, we thought Two Mice was the best name, but that it would be nicer in Dutch. Now it's funny, because here in Spain nobody can pronounce it!

Who does what in your studio?

Barrientos: At the very beginning it was Denís who designed our art toys. Once we had five or six, we decided to hold our first exhibition, with these pieces and the illustrations Denís that was doing at this time. When preparing for the exhibition, I also felt the need to express my creativity, so I started participating in the design process. We used to do the same characters as an art toy and an illustration, and it's difficult now to know which one came first.

Nowadays I take care of the textile parts and Denís does the graphics



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Above: Eladero ('ice cream man'), is one of Twee Muizen's art toys, and part of their Barbudo ('bearded man') collection.

Top left and right: Fine artist Denís Galocha has a distinctively surreal style of illustrating.

Bottom: The pair exhibited their work at this year's Pictoplasma festival in Berlin.

and painting, but we create the idea and concept together. We discuss the colours we want to use, the figures that we want to represent, and everything comes together as we do.

How would you describe your style?

Galocha: Everything was a kind of evolution. My illustrations and the art toys that Cris was doing used to be more childish, but they became more surreal and elaborate.

Barrientos: I think we can say that our style is pop surrealism. We try to represent the beauty we always find in the organic shapes of nature; the relationship between human beings and their environment. We're also big fans of popular culture and different traditions. In almost all our work, pastel colours dominate.

How do your tastes differ?

Galocha: My background is in graffiti, and I'm passionate about comic culture. When I was a child I used to draw all the characters that I saw in my books. I remember the first exhibition that I went to was about Surrealism in Spain, and most of the artists were Catalan. I was 10 years old and it already had an impact on what I wanted to do. This surreal aesthetic and modernist influence is my biggest contribution to our style.

Barrientos: In my case, since I was a little girl I always had a craft project in my hands, so I decided to study fashion design. But while working in fashion I realised that what attracted me was the creative and manual part, and I was very far from that world. Everything was fast and frivolous. Nowadays, I still browse fashion magazines to see what inspires me, from fashion shows to colours, and even techniques such as embroidery.

My contribution might be the more traditional parts of the project, the taste for harmonic chromatic ranges or the artistic styling present in our photoshoots.





You've been doing a lot of murals recently. How did that come about?

Galocha: When I was young the police caught me with some spray paint in the street, and took me back to my parents. I got a good reprimand. Now my parents are proud of the murals we do. Instead of creating graffiti, I would paint almost every day at home, and went on to study fine art.

About three years ago, we painted a friend's house. We published some photos and we contacted by the organisers of several mural art festivals. We also won a contest to create a mural in Oviedo, northern Spain, which we believe will become part of the city's identity.

Why do you enjoy mural work?

Galocha: One thing about painting on a large scale in the street is the number of people that can see your work. It gives you the feeling that you've brought some beauty to the city, and seeing your work at that scale is always impressive.

Barrientos: It's also nice to meet the people who live nearby. We have had great experiences, and we now know some incredible, kind people.

What were the challenges of scaling up your work?

Galocha: Something that I like to do in each mural, which I think is sometimes the most complex part, is to adjust the chromatic range to



MURAL PHOTOGRAPHS © MIRAHACIAATRAS

fit the environment and at the same time introduce some light and life to that wall.

Perhaps the worst aspect is trying to fit the drawing, as I have it in mind, into the space. For this stage I create a grid that's adjusted to the wall measurements. It's the most boring part. Once I have the grid I enjoy the process a lot – every day you see the evolution of the design and people who pass by congratulate you. I couldn't ask for more!

How did the idea for your fake taxidermy come about?

Barrientos: The first animal head we made was of an elephant. At that time there was a great controversy because the king of Spain was hunting elephants in Botswana. We weren't trying to make a point, but the subject came into our heads almost subconsciously.

After this first head we began to think about the animals that are killed to be displayed in typical mountain houses, and it seemed a good idea to offer our animals with this sense of friendly taxidermy.

Were the masks an extension of your taxidermy work?

Barrientos: Not really. We've always liked this mixture of the surreal with the real, which is the result of

Facing page: traditional costumes provide inspiration for Twee Muizen's masks (top left and middle); Twee Muizen's murals can be found all over the world (bottom left and top right); the pair describe their style as "pop surrealism" (bottom right).

Above: a mural celebrating writer Leopoldo Alas Clarín, which the duo hope will become part of Oviedo's city identity. Left: Galocha branched out into tattooing around four years ago, and has developed a separate style, using only black ink.

taking photographs of people wearing these masks. This project is a means of experimenting with new techniques.

I love all the traditional costumes and rites that have developed from around the world. It's amazing how some people from villages are using the same costumes from years and years ago, but they still have their own particular style. We also have our own carnival in Galicia, an area of north-west Spain, which is where we found some of our inspiration. We call it Entroido.

We don't know where we're going with our masks, but right now we're working on an interesting project with the band Honolulu. We created three bird masks for their music video – we're very intrigued to see the final result.

You produce editorial illustrations alongside your art. Do you enjoy working to a specific brief, from time to time?

Galocha: I prefer doing my own illustrations and capturing my ideas, but when you're asked for work of this kind, it means someone has picked you out for that commission, so on the one hand you feel that you're doing well. Sometimes I have insecurities and this type of commission is gratifying in that



IN CONVERSATION



Top left: pastel colours dominate in Twee Muizen's aesthetic.

Top right: a friendlier take on traditional taxidermy.

Below: for each mural, Galocha will adjust the colour palette to fit the environment.

sense. It also depends a lot on what I have to represent. Some articles are more fun than others.

Can you tell us a bit about your gallery in Barcelona?

Barrientos: Three years ago we opened our studio and gallery in Barcelona. The main objective was to have a comfortable space to work – working at home was becoming complicated! The place we found also gave us the opportunity to display our work.

At first it was strange to serve your own customers, but gradually we became used to it. We believe people who enter our studio like to see how we work and know a little of the history behind everything they see. When we have to do some work outside the studio we just close for a few days.



How do you promote your work?

Barrientos: We're happy sewing and painting, and of course you want the recognition of people, but it costs us a lot. We use Instagram and Facebook, but not as much as we should. Almost all the projects we've done so far have been very casual.

What are your current projects?

Barrientos: We're doing workshops of mural art with children. It's a new thing for us. It's very intense, but at the same time gratifying. The

workshops finish this week and at the end we'll join the children to paint three murals in front of the Barcelona Science Museum. Our work also appeared at the opening of a new art space called Spectrum in Barcelona. Finally, we're creating masks for the music video we mentioned, and preparing for urban art festivals in Romania and Paris.

How do you work together?

Barrientos: We work in our studio. We might spend many hours in silence, just with the music on, or we might be talking during the whole day. We always like to have the approval from the other one. It was harder at the beginning, but now it's much easier. All this time working together also gives you the skills to do it in a good mood!

What response do you hope to create with your work?

Barrientos: To be honest there's no clear intention, we get what we get! We like to see all kinds of reactions in the viewer. We believe our work tends to arouse joy, sympathy and sensations that make us feel good. We don't do it with that intention, but we'd like it to be that way. ■

