



A CRIER AT THE POLLING STATION ON CASP STREET IN BARCELONA

FEBRUARY 16, 1936

Arxiu Fotogràfic de Barcelona/Archivo Familia Puig Farran © Arxiu Família Puig Farran

JOAN ANDREU PUIG FARRAN

A DECADE OF TURMOIL
(1929-1939)

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A DECADE OF TURMOIL (1929-1939)

Many things occur in the great Catalan metropolis and throughout its sphere of influence, much as they did during the exciting and turbulent interwar period in Spain and Europe. Photojournalists took pictures non-stop: a political rally, the scene of a crime, theaters on Barcelona's Avinguda Paral·lel, a car race, a football match, and Catalan rural life. Newspapers and magazines required a constant flow of images; a visual testimony of the tensions and contradictions of modern mass society, eager to know and see everything. Press photographers such as Joan Andreu Puig Farran (Belianes, Lleida, 1904 – Barcelona, 1982) became the tireless chroniclers of a wide range of settings. His appearance in Catalonia's photographic scene was brief but intense. Between 1929 and 1939—from the World's Fair in Barcelona to the end of the Spanish Civil War—Puig Farran produced thousands of photographs that are key in understanding the extraordinary, tense, and diverse urban life of the time. Farran's name became familiar to the readers of Catalan newspapers during that tumultuous decade. In the late 1920s, after settling in Barcelona and partnering with Carlos Pérez de Rozas Masdeu, Puig Farran's independent career took off. His work began to flood the pages of newspapers like *La Humanitat* and *Última Hora*—both aligned with ERC (Esquerra Republicana de Catalunya)—and regularly appeared on the front cover of the pro-Catalan Catholic weekly *Esplai*. Eventually, Farran's images were featured in the photo sections of *La Vanguardia*, the most widely circulated newspaper in Catalonia. Initially with his Contessa Nettel plate camera and, from 1936 onward, with the more versatile Leica, Puig Farran developed a distinctive style, evolving from traditional stills to dynamic images that captured the velocity of sports and the intensity of political life.

Throughout this decade of turmoil, Puig Farran produced a rich and varied photographic corpus, which due to the path his life took, with

survives as a limited personal record that can only be completed with archival materials from the press. Although he was an active photographer during the Civil War, covering the Republican fronts in Aragón and the failed attempt to seize Mallorca in 1936, his career was cut short when he became exiled in France, in 1939, and was detained in several Spanish and French concentration camps. Banned from photojournalism by the Francoist regime, he shifted to industrial and tourism photography, partnering with Antoni Campañà to create the postcard company CYP (Campañà y Puig Farran) in 1952.

This exhibition aims to restore Joan Andreu Puig Farran to the position he rightfully holds within the rich world of Catalan photojournalism during those turbulent years.

Arnau Gonzàlez i Vilalta, Toni Monné Campañà,
curators of the exhibition

[I]

THE CONTRASTS OF DAILY LIFE IN BARCELONA AND CATALONIA (1929-1936)

Between 1931 and 1936, Barcelona was a city of stark contrasts. For a photographer like Joan Andreu Puig Farran, who arrived in the Catalan capital in the late 1920s from his native Lleida, these contrasts—the shift from countryside to city, from Pyrenean shepherds to urban bustle, or from Barceloneta fishermen to actresses in the theaters of Avinguda Paral·lel—must have made a strong impression. At a time when photojournalism was booming, like his colleagues, Puig Farran snapped pictures in every direction, fueling the public's need to “see everything.” What might captivate readers the most? Hindu students visiting the Palau de la Generalitat, the image of the Apostolic Nuncio in Spain awaiting Pope Pius XI at the port of Barcelona, or a lamb's unlikely resistance against human domination while being dragged along Passeig de Sant Joan?

Puig Farran captured all these contradictory events coexisting at once: officials distributing bread and rice to children in need, while others wandered through the toy section of a department store, crowds awaiting the Christmas lottery in the hope of being “liberated”, as the Catalan bourgeoisie relaxed on their yachts; poverty and consumerism.

[II]

THE PEACEFUL WARS: SPORTS

From 1929—the year Spain’s first football league was held—to the end of the Civil War in 1939, sports occupied an increasingly prominent space in a society that experienced constant politicization and possessed will to be entertained. Despite the lack of public policies aimed at promoting sports in Catalonia and Spain as a whole, there was a surge in amateur sports that was coupled with the rise of professional football, cycling, and boxing, drawing tens of thousands of spectators to stadiums. As sports participation grew, some political sectors—conservative and anarchist revolutionary alike—were critical, claiming it blurred class lines and undermined public morals.

Sports photography helped turn the players of FC Barcelona, the captain of Madrid FC, cyclists like Marià Cañardo, and boxers like Josep Gironès, along with other amateur athletes, into media stars, who were captured by Puig Farran’s lens. In turn, Farran became one of the most sought-after photographers for sporting event coverage. His portrayals of such events ranged from the Spanish Football Championship finals at the Montjuïc stadium to skiing and more elitist affairs such as horse races.

[III]

THE EVENTS OF OCTOBER 6th, 1934

Instability was commonplace during the interwar period. In 1934, Europe was in turmoil: coup attempts in Paris and Vienna, tensions between Barcelona and Madrid, Hitler in power in Germany, and Stalin gazing upon these events from the Kremlin. On October 6th, 1934, the President of the Generalitat de Catalunya, Lluís Companys, proclaimed the Catalan State within a Spanish Federal Republic—a protest against the entry into Alejandro Lerroux’s conservative Republican government of the reactionary right-wing CEDA. Halfway between a push for sovereignty and a moderate leftist attempt to regain control of the 1931 Republic, Barcelona and Catalonia experienced—to varying degrees—a failed revolution of Catalanistas and the radical left.

Puig Farran, who was familiar with the violence from both sides of the political spectrum, photographed the key figures before, during, and after October 6th: the former Prime Minister Manuel Azaña, Companys himself, armed civilians supporting the Generalitat, and the soldiers deployed by General Domènec Batet of the Fourth Army Division sent in to crush the uprising. The stage was set for the Spanish Civil War.

[IV]

DAILY LIFE OR POLITICS?

The intensity of public life in 1930s Barcelona and Catalonia makes it difficult to clearly separate daily events from political ones. This is reflected in the work of photojournalists like Joan Andreu Puig Farran, who covered subjects ranging from elections, rallies, and protests to seemingly mundane affairs that helped to capture the essence of the city.

At a time when radio was becoming increasingly ubiquitous—Radio Barcelona (EAJ-1) being Spain's first station in 1924—and cinema granted a perspective on distant worlds—both real and imagined—photojournalism provided readers with insight into the vibrancy and variety of life around them. Amid this complex and intertwined reality, politics continued to maintain a distinct identity within Puig Farran's photographs: images that were calm and serene in nature—with the sole exception of those depicting the events of October 6th, 1934. Citizens and politicians remained oblivious to the incumbent intensity that would soon sweep everything away. Candidates spoke to their supporters, while pedestrians peacefully observed campaign posters and lined up to vote in 1933 and 1936.

[V]

TOTAL DERAILMENT: THE CIVIL WAR

With the outbreak of the Spanish Civil War in the summer of 1936, Puig Farran intensified his work. Now under the control of leftist parties and unions, the press covered matters ranging from a hyper-politicized city of Barcelona to the front lines in Aragon, as well as the Generalitat's failed attempt to take Mallorca.

Occasionally assisted by his brother Alfons, Puig Farran expanded his presence, particularly in newspapers such as *La Vanguardia*, *L'Instant*, and the modern *Última Hora*. In hindsight, his portraits of the rearguard and front lines conveyed the contradictions and parallel realities of the conflict: from wounded militiamen in Barcelona hospitals, to sunbathers on the city's beaches. Likewise, in the service of Republican propaganda aimed at convincing the public that victory was possible, Farran also delivered epic portrayals of war and death.

These images were widely circulated, paradoxically leading to the end of Puig Farran's career. His prominent role in Republican war photojournalism and the time he spent exiled in France would place him in the crosshairs of the incumbent Francoist dictatorship. Upon his return to Spain, after some time spent in French refugee settlements, he was imprisoned in the Miranda de Ebro concentration camp and sentenced to death. Ultimately, Farran's conviction was commuted and he would later be purged, leading him to be permanently banned from his profession.



Barcelona Photo Center