

Spain, Stylish Pacesetter in Sport Art

HAROLD L. RAY

Western Michigan University

A 1970 sabbatical leave permitted research in 21 countries of Europe but it was necessary to omit the Iberian peninsula. This omission was remedied in 1981 when another sabbatical leave focused on scenic, sensuous Spain. The belief that a sport art genre existed in Spain led to a five-month camping experience crisscrossing Iberia. The findings justified the effort.

In all, more than 60 museums and galleries were visited in Spain. This broad sweep covered a wide range - cathedral collections, the archaeology of Roman times, an 18th century tapestry factory, National Museums of Ceramics and Abstract Art - from remote provincial villages to bustling Madrid. Among the forms of sport art uncovered were tapestries, coins, oils, sculpture, graphics, stamps, ceramics, furniture, frescos, friezes, silver, costumes, etc. The architecture of Spain's bull rings is a reflection, too, of a national heritage in this ancient, controversial pageant of courage.

The slides (2300+) taken during the five-month sojourn mirror the unique richness of Spanish history. Roman and Moorish influences on the art of Spain are clearly evident. While the followers of Islam rarely portrayed it, recreational sport emerges in the art of the 17th to 19th century Spain - for instance, in azulejos, sculpture, and paintings. The azulejos (tiles) appear singly or in groups - in panoramic scenes - to reflect everyday life. The same time frame includes depictions of sport on bowls (tazones) and plates (platos). (The azulejos of Portugal, while more limited in their coloration, furnish a similar portrait of sport activities of that part of the peninsula). Unusually colorful portrayals of sport appear in the tapestries of Spain. Those of 18th century artist Francisco Bayeu and his brother-in-law Francisco Goya glowingly show the recreational pastimes of the people. These popular "hangings" are still manufactured in the Royal Tapestry Factory in Madrid.

However, it is in 20th century art that the Spanish imprint is the strongest. Since 1965, the Consejo Superior de Deportes has sponsored a "Bienal Internacional de Deporte en las Bellas Artes." Held in either Barcelona or Madrid, this competition attracts the works of artists from around the world; i.e. 1979 had 28 countries represented. These competitions have produced a wealth of art in the primary media of paintings, sculpture, tapestries, trophies + medals, graphics, posters, and drawings. The 1982 biennial includes a top prize of approximately \$10,000 with a special award for soccer of \$7500 - since Madrid is the site of the 1982 World Games this summer. Other awards, ranging from \$5000 each in painting, sculpture and architecture to prizes of \$500 in graphics bring the total prize money for the latest competition to approximately \$41,500. The contributions of Spanish artists have been foremost among the avant garde products of such challenging affairs. The results are impressive.

The opportunity to work with talented professionals in Barcelona and Madrid was a marvelous experience. (For example, it was possible to work directly with editors of the two major professional publications, DEPORTE 2000, and APUNTES: de MEDICINA DEPORTIVA.). Treated with patience, warmth, and genuine courtesy, this researcher concluded that the level of sport art in Spain is in a class by itself. It provides a revealing look at the culture of a fascinating, colorful people. Hopefully, the visual part of the presentation has demonstrated that our Spanish colleagues are indeed stylish pacesetters in sport art.