

FROM THE WALL TO THE SCREEN

FASHION VICTIMS 2.0 AN ANIMATION SHORT FILM REVIEW

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Abstract

This article reviews an acclaimed Spanish animated short film created by María Lorenzo in 2023 as a tribute to urban artist Escif. Based on his mural painting *Fashion Victims*, controversial for its criticism towards an industrial model that is both massive and unsustainable, but which has eventually become a hallmark of the Valencian neighborhood where it is located, the short film *Fashion Victims 2.0* brings the mural's characters to life based on photographs of it to denounce our passivity towards child labor and its questionable conditions in developing countries. The film was screened at the 2024 Cyprus Fashion Film Festival.

Keywords: *Fashion Victims; María Lorenzo; Escif, Street Art; Animation*

It all begins in January 2022. Valencian artist Escif is commissioned to create a mural, the production of which will be captured by the cameras of a documentary about Equipo Crónica, the paradigmatic artistic duet of the Spanish Transition that brought the social and political reality of the moment to the galleries through a pop aesthetic that channeled a profoundly revisionist perspective. Under the slogan "Can art be a weapon?", the documentary *Equipo Crónica. Trench Art*, directed by Rafa Sesa and Felipe Villaplana, would not be premiered until 2025. In this time span, Escif's mural, which was announced as temporary in the chosen location—a municipally owned wall, behind the Bullfighting Museum and strategically located in front of the busy store of a well-known

multinational fashion company— continues to stand as an independent voice that has inherited the critical bias of the Valencian team composed at the time by Manolo Valdés and Rafa Solbes. And although the one-year deadline agreed between the production company Zootropo Studio and the city council has largely expired, the municipal ordinance that was supposed to activate its deletion has been suspended indefinitely (Devís, 2024, n/p).

This achievement has been a landmark for Escif—first nicknamed Escyf—, who began his career as a graffiti writer in 1996 and has since established himself as a consolidated artist at museums, galleries and completing major commissions such as the Valencian Fallas, though

without losing the nonconformist and deeply uncomfortable vision he displayed in his early murals, now lost, which populated his hometown during the wave of protests during the Valencian Spring of 2012. Known as the Spanish Banksy, Escif has left his mark on walls around the world, including countries devastated by war and commercial exploitation, such as Lebanon, Syria, and Indonesia, experiences that underscore his sincere activism for a more just and egalitarian world. As Escif asserts, ‘a painted wall ceases to be a boundary and becomes an open channel of communication [...] demonstrating that another world is possible, opening a rift in the heart of the city’ (Escif, 2010, p. 91).

The criticism in Escif’s painting is all the more effective because it is devoid of artifice: his scenes present alienated characters, their expression absent in a strangely aseptic world dipped on gray and muted tones that is, however, distorted by some inexplicable presence: through visual irony, Escif reveals our inexplicable tolerance towards corruption or injustice, both towards problems in our society and towards otherness, the inhabitants of other countries to whom we are inevitably connected through our decisions, such as our consumption habits. In his own words, Escif always tries ‘to erase (or at least blur) the boundaries between life and spectacle, between presentation and representation, between contemplation and experience, between landscape and territory, between the power of institutions and the power of people’ (Escif, 2024, p. 285).¹

Following this ideology, the painting *Fashion Victims* (Fig. 01) is deliberately designed to stir consciences, depicting a group of children working in a Southeast Asian textile workshop; surrounded by foremen and the piles of clothing they produce, hovering above them the catalog prices of the well-known affordable clothing brand whose headquarters are on the same corner. The heartbreaking presence of the mural in the square leaves no one indifferent since it invites the passersby see, as María Lorenzo notes, ‘both sides of the same coin: buying affordable clothing from a multinational also means collaborating with that kind of unsustainable market.’ (ZF Team, 2024, n/p).

This powerful image was the inspiration for María Lorenzo, an animator who began her journey in short-form cinema when she studied Fine Arts

in the late 1990s. She is fond of incorporating the diverse languages of art into her productions, creating films from a more pictorial style that draw on the realism of Joaquín Sorolla and John Singer Sargent (*Portrait of D.*, 2003; *The Night Ocean*, 2015) to tributes to the world of pre-cinema (*Impromptu*, 2017) and fictions that draw on the aesthetics of *film noir* and Expressionist cinema (*The Carnivorous Flower*, 2009; *The Cat Dances with its Shadow*, 2012; *Felina*, 2024). Street Art, a movement with a strong presence in Valencia, has not been an exception to María Lorenzo, who created *Urban Sphinx* taking from more than 3,000 photographs showing various pieces of paste-up, stencil art and murals found on the street between 2018 and 2019. In this film, María Lorenzo also approached for the first time the idea of animation as an archive for Street Art: while graffiti and other manifestations are, by their nature, ephemeral works, animation records their memory forever.

When María Lorenzo made *Fashion Victims 2.0*, the challenge was to start from a single image: the mural by Escif, which in turn showed a multiplicity of characters (children, foremen), objects (sewing machines, clothing), and symbols (prices and names of garments). Each of these elements could then be divided into sub-elements: heads, feet, hands, the sewing machine wheel, the needle, etc. During two photo sessions, general images and details of all the elements were collected to play with the montage and create short films: hands moving the fabric, heads turning, the needle sewing, the piles of clothing growing... In the film’s editing, these scenes were distributed, accompanied by the sound of sewing machines, creating a progression toward a climax, increasing the speed of the succession of scenes, until the sound of the machine abruptly stops when one girl looks at the camera. The film ends with the title ‘Fashion Victims’ painted on the mural, as drops of paint fall from it (Fig. 02).

In María Lorenzo’s words, she has ‘intended to transmit the exact message of ESCIF, without any alteration of the image, other than that which involves cutting up the frames and composing a hypothetical movement’ (ZF Team, 2024, n/p), although following the same author, who wrote the essay ‘The transforming power of animation on Street Art’,

Animation’s essential contribution to urban art is to make visible what is invisible to the eye: to bring to life an image, an object that, paradoxically,

¹ Translated by Graham Bell



Fig. 01



Fig. 02

remains static, but which in its animated form transforms into something impossible to perceive with the naked eye. Like the ancient art of Anamorphosis, animation *reanimates* Street Art because it brings it to life by showing it from a different, lateral, artificial, and unexpected angle. (Lorenzo, 2022, p. 92) ²

In *Fashion Victims 2.0*, the transformation of the mural into animation (Fig. 03) occurs thanks to a completely experimental vision of the medium: if other murals by Escif had previously been animated by turning the painted images into animated characters in a traditional way, as Silvia Carpizo did in her 2013 short film, *Alienation*, creating a narrative dynamic, Lorenzo's strategy is more similar to that of animators who experiment with the limits of the animated medium, such as Paul Bush or, especially, Gil Alkabetz, 'whose game between the still, the inanimate and motion, animating the changing forms at hyper speed, establishes a privileged relationship between animation and the world of objects' (Lorenzo, 2020, p. 649). Parallels can be drawn between

Fashion Victims 2.0 and Gil Alkabetz's short film *The Da Vinci Time Code* (2009), created entirely from an image borrowed from Leonardo Da Vinci, none other than the mural *The Last Supper*, which becomes a lively gathering through the careful selection of frames and the combination of photographs that create visual rhythms.

Fashion Victims 2.0 was presented to the audience under a challenging tagline: 'An inconvenient truth: the Western fashion industry is sustained by forced child labor in the Third World. Will you continue to tolerate it?' Despite this, the short film's format, faithful in spirit to Escif's mural, maintains a subtle and distant tone. For Vassilis Kroustalis, '*Fashion Victims 2.0* looks almost like a procedural, business-as-usual film [...]. The visual texture reinforces the taste of the garment to be worn, while the sound design makes it obvious that this is a repetitive, mundane procedure' (ZP Team, 2024, n/p). Also, by the time of its premiere at Annecy 2023, Ray Laguna stated that the most striking quality of *Fashion Victims 2.0* is that, despite working with such limited material, [María Lorenzo] squeezes it in such a creative way that, at a certain point,

2 Author's translation



Fig. 03

it seems as if the mural has come to life or, even more extraordinary, that they are paintings made expressly for an animated piece. The proposed exercise in minimalism is enormously suggestive. (Laguna, 2023, n/p)

³What becomes evident when seeing *Fashion Victims 2.0* is that the mural's transformation to animation doesn't change its message but rather amplifies it. Its short duration, with its rhythmic *crescendo* and the deliberate absence of dialogue and music, gives the viewer room to interpretations. To date, the film has been selected at 75 film and animation festivals from 20 countries, with particular mention for its inclusion in programs focusing on environmental, documentary, and social themes at festivals such as Rising of the Lusitania – Animadoc 2023, Festival de Cine de Málaga 2024, Stuttgart Animation Festival 2024, Palm Springs AmDocs 2024 or Cine-Court Animé de Roanne 2024, as well as its selection at the 2024 Cyprus Fashion Film Festival. It was also screened at Cannes Film Festival 2023 within the program *Revelations. New*

3 Author's translation.



Fig. 04

Spanish Animation Short Films curated by Carolina López Caballero. Despite its fiercely experimental nature, and the fact that it is based on a painting rather than a filmed reality, *Fashion Victims 2.0*'s presence at numerous documentary film events allows us to understand the scope of the social critique expressed in Escif's work, which spreads a vision rarely represented in the media. It also demonstrates Lorenzo's desire for non-intervention in his urban art films (Fig. 04), which become veritable the archive of ephemeral yet unforgettable images.

CAPTIONS

[Fig. 01] Escif; *Fashion Victims* mural by Escif as it appears in the film *Fashion Victims 2.0*; María Lorenzo courtesy.

[Fig. 02] María Lorenzo; title of film *Fashion Victims 2.0*; María Lorenzo courtesy.

[Fig. 03] Escif; *Fashion Victims* detail of a working young girl by Escif as it appears in the film *Fashion Victims 2.0*; María Lorenzo courtesy.

[Fig. 04] María Lorenzo; affiche of film *Fashion Victims 2.0*; public domain.

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