



Tomasz SALINSKI

photographer

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Tomasz is a Polish-born photographer, educated as an anthropologist and documentaries director. He has a professional experience on all sorts of different sets ranging from news production, documentary to advertising and theatre. While doing random jobs in remote parts of Europe and Asia, with no camera at all, Tomasz discovered how much photography meant to him. One day, he met two Bangladeshi photographers in Dhaka, and suddenly after this encounter he was on the way from Myanmar to Nepal and started photography with the use of their kits. Since then, he collaborates with several NGOs and is interested in stories that *matter* for him. He travels the world from Europe to Latin America and Asia.



Within the *Sevillanas* Collective. A Photographic Testimonial

Masdenverge is a village situated in the province of Tarragona, the autonomous community of Catalonia, Spain. Covering a total area of 14.6 km², the population of the village amounts to a little more than 1,000 inhabitants. The village emerged at the heart of the meander of the Rambla de la Galera stream, and its origins go back to the middle of the 18th century. The establishment of the village is concomitant with the construction of the Virgen del Roser chapel (*Our Lady of the Rosary*), situated in the eastern part of the village, which became a parish church in the 1960s.

Although it does not include a large nucleus, the village has a dynamic life as certified by the existence of various cultural entities, such as the Masdenverge Musical Union, which features a school and a music band. The town celebrates its main festival annually, in honour of the Virgin of the Rosary, at the beginning of August and, among celebrated events, the bullfighter and the rabbit race stand out even today.

The traditional economy of Masdenverge is predominantly agricultural. The main crops have been olive trees, which, despite their regression, have maintained their predominance. Vineyards and carob trees have virtually disappeared, and almond trees have declined in the face of the emergence of fruit trees, mainly mandarins and orange trees.

Nonetheless, the region depends largely on nature-based and rural tourism, and the cities of Tortosa and Amposta – not far from Masdenverge – have shopping centres. A market is held every day within the village.

The most important cultural characteristic of the village is the collective of traditional women dancers called *Sevillanas*. Run by the *maestra* Dolors Cañellas Reverté, the collective is composed of many women of different ages, who, for many years, promote and sustain the traditional folk dance. The participation of the collective in the main cultural events and the celebrations of the Saint Patron of the village – Virgin of the Rosary – is deeply enmeshed in the local memory of the community. Whereas before the dance representations were a form of entertainment and preservation of local traditions, during the COVID pandemic the *Sevillanas* collective suffered a major metamorphosis, both structural and aesthetic.

The village of Masdenverge was severely impacted by the continuous confinements, since the local population depended mainly on tourism, and the local economy became quickly ruined. As a result of the waves of interdictions, the village became completely isolated.



Without financial resources, which entailed the impossibility to pay for electricity, the village was covered in darkness. What's more, the lack of electricity impacted the heating system of the village, and since spring in Catalonia is very cold and humid, the villagers were confronted with low temperatures in their households. The locals were depressed, while thoroughly respecting the confinement rules and interdictions.

Amidst this local crisis, the *Sevillanas* collective started to meet in small groups, and performed folk dances while wearing masks, because even if the village was isolated, it was illegal to meet in groups of more than 20 persons. Thus, the dances of the *Sevillanas* soon became something entirely new – a form of group therapy and one of the very few ways in which women could vent their frustrations. It was also a way of generating body heat. Simply dance. And every new dance was also a glimmer of hope that maybe all the restrictions would be lifted, and a new *normality* would arise.

During the time I spent in Masdenverge, Dolors Cañellas Reverté was my landlady. In June 2021, during the confinement, she invited me to attend one of the rehearsals and immortalize it with my camera. There was no audience whatsoever. The group was meeting in the local school, which functions as a cultural centre, too, and where different events are being held. Photographing the rehearsals was a particularly difficult task, notably because of the lack of light in the school. Nonetheless, the photographs show clearly – to me – that the dances were the beginning of a healing process.

“Dream big / Turn your life around / Fall in love / Laugh until you cry” – just as the symbolical message on Dolors' T-shirt reads – sums up the experience within the *Sevillanas* collective in Masdenverge.

Masdenverge is a small town in Catalonia. It's finally the end of the second or third lockdown. No one really counts them any more. Things start very slowly getting back to some form of normal or new normal. No one really knows what to expect. This group has been meeting for months to practise; simply dance. It's a form of group therapy and one of very few ways women can vent their frustrations. Local economy is ruined because it depends heavily on tourism.



Maestra: Dolors Cañellas Reverté, she runs the group (up and right).
In pictures: Sevillanas, a type of folk music and dance.