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www.KinshipCircle.org ▼ info@kinshipcircle.org

BULLFIGHTS & BLOOD FIESTAS



Photo: McMurry

by Brenda Shoss

Bullfight posters adorn the town of Marbella, Spain. Headlines promise a life-and-death saga starring *female* matador Christina Sanchez. Greg McMurry and Rhonda Gunner nab ringside seats to the fight in Puerto Banus.

To the delight of the California tourists, owners of a film production company, the spectacle unravels in technicolor splendor. Girls atop elegant Andalusian horses escort performers before a cheering crowd. Then a trumpet cues the emptying of the ring. It's time to make way for the bull.

He emerges from a shadowy tunnel, a blur of dark rage. Costumed matadors goad the bull and duck behind blockades to escape his fury. "They must have done something to that bull, because he was pissed," McMurry later wrote.

Prior to a fight, bulls are "conditioned" to heighten drama inside the ring. Handlers may subdue a bull with tranquilizers and laxatives, pound his kidneys, club his head with sandbags, or loop heavy weights around his neck for weeks. Sometimes they smear a bull's eyes with petroleum jelly or restrain him in darkness to obscure vision. Though illegal, some handlers shave inches off the bull's horns to impede his sense of direction.

The result is an agitated and disabled bull. Each time Sanchez's bull charges the arc of her cape, she gracefully sidesteps the animal. During the "quieting of the bull" several men plunge decorative sticks into the bull's neck.

Next, "picadors" on horseback impale his back and neck muscles with blade-tipped poles. "The bull was bleeding profusely," McMurry wrote after his trip. "Often the bull was so weak he'd collapse. A bunch of guys ran into the ring to poke him and bend his tail to get him up."

At this point Sanchez, in a gold-flecked jumpsuit and purple bolero jacket, gestures triumphantly to her fans. "Banderilleros" step in to spear the dying

animal and drive him in circles. For the final kill, Sanchez sinks a three-foot long sword into the bull. The bull's ears and tail are removed to honor her victory.

"After it was all over, [Rhonda and I] agreed we had lost our respect for those who would enjoy such an event," McMurry said. "An art form? It was hard to believe that a culture so rich with art and beauty would still be entertaining themselves in this manner."

Bullfights originated in Spain to hail aristocratic weddings, military conquests, and religious events. By the 18th century, the proletariat (mainly slaughterhouse workers) replaced the horseback-



McMurry

Matador Christina Sanchez, fights in Puerto Banus. Triumphant gesture.



A bleeding bull gasps for breath near end of a bullfight. Photo: ADDA



mounted elite to fight bulls on foot. Charles IV banned the bloodsport in 1805, but its luster returned under Ferdinand VII's reign. Today two styles, Seville and Rhonda, shape the classical art of "corrida."

Each year 35,000 bulls are killed in Spain alone. Proponents such as writer David Daniel liken the experience to "a courtroom ballet in three parts: Trial, sentence, execution." Opponents question the nobility of a match between armed humans and a disoriented animal. "In this world, bulls die anyway," Daniel asserts. "They're raised for meat and leather." But slaughterhouse suffering is a byproduct. In the bullfight arena, suffering is the point. Without the bull's prolonged agony there is no show.

Animal abuse to serve art, heritage or religion is not exclusive to Latin cultures. Yet these cultures build a lucrative tourism industry around the violent animal exhibition. To lure tourists, travel agents and bullfight organizers package bloodsports as festive shows.

Additional blood fiestas, such as the "encierro" (running of the bulls), annually occur throughout Spain. For Catalonia's "toros de fuego," a bull with balls of fire affixed to his horns is released into a jeering mob. In the "toros ensogados" a bull is dragged through the streets by his horns. In Coria, tourists and locals aim dart guns at a fleeing bull's nose, eyes and testicles. The mangled bull is eventually castrated while alive.

Mexico holds baby bullfights (the novillada) that pit knife-wielding audience members against calves, some only weeks old. The free-for-all ends when participants slice off the conscious animals' ears and tails.

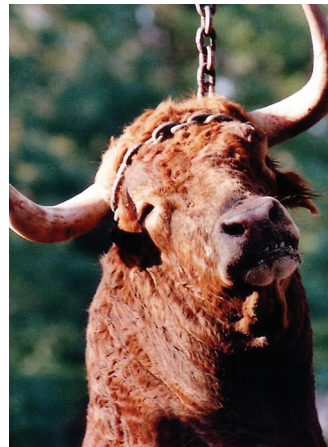
For Brazil's Farra do Boi, adults and children from the coastal villages of Santa Catarina torture an ox to commemorate weddings, birthdays or other milestones. Equipped with knives, whips, and stones, revelers try to keep the ox alive during three or more days of brutality. An animal's eyes are typically gouged out after participants flick pepper into them. His horns and legs are broken and his tail is severed. WSPA correspondents in Brazil have observed gasoline-soaked oxen set on fire.

Cows aren't the only victims of ritualized abuse. According to UK-based FAACE (Fight Against Animal Cruelty In Europe), chickens rank second, followed by pigs, geese, ducks, donkeys, squirrels, rabbits and pigeons. In Spain, FAACE monitors pigeon stoning and squirrels encased in clay pots, along with the crushing of donkeys and beheading of chickens buried to the neck. They've documented blindfolded teenage girls hacking apart live chickens, horsemen decapitating chickens slung from a line, and religious followers tossing a live goat from a church tower.

While cultures may not understand one another's customs, all rational humans comprehend cruelty. Our capacity for mercy puts the "kind" in humankind. Bullfights and blood fiestas have no place in a morally accountable world.

What You Can Do

1.) In countries with legalized bullfighting: Tell your travel agent you oppose animal abuse and reject lodging accommodations where bullfight arenas are promoted as "recreation." Write to the resort's owner to clarify why you won't stay there. Consider traveling to resort towns that have banned bullfighting.



Ears and tail removed, a live bull is brutally killed. Anti-bullfighting Campaign, The Netherlands
Chickens hung from line, beheaded by horsemen in Nalda.



1/08: Portuguese TV station stops airing bullfights: Too violent for minors.

2007: Gallup poll shows over 72% of Spaniards have no interest in bullfighting.

8/07: State-run Spanish TV ends all live coverage of bullfights, stating the images are too violent for children, and that live coverage violates an industry-wide code that limits "sequences that are particularly crude or brutal."

2007: Baños de Agua Santa, Ecuador: 1st city in Americas to be anti-bullfighting.

4/6/04: Barcelona, Spain officially declares Barcelona, capital of Catalonia, an anti-bullfight city. Since then, 44 more towns and villages in region proclaim themselves opposed to bullfighting. More cities — Torello, Calldetenes, and Olot (which boasts the second oldest bullring in Spain) — do the same.

What You Can Do (cont'd)

2.) Prior to a vacation abroad, contact a country's embassy to find out if bullfights, blood fiestas or animal rituals are advertised as attractions. Identify yourself as a tourist who opposes the cruel exhibition of animals.

3.) Tell Spanish and Mexican embassies in your country you won't visit any community that hosts bloodsports and animal rituals.

Contact info for embassies around world: www.embassyworld.com

A Dying "Art?"

March 2011: Ecuador proposes a law that to let cities and counties to ban bullfighting.

July 2010: Catalonia becomes the first mainland Spain region to outlaw bullfighting. Barcelona's oldest bullring in Spain is now permanently shuttered.

Feb 2010: China nixes proposed bullfighting: After Huaiming Zhou, director of Committee on Science-Technology, traveled to Spain to acquire 100 cows/100 bulls, China bullfight plans fall apart due to enormous opposition.

3/3/09: Viana do Castelo, city in northern Portugal, becomes first in the country to ban bullfighting. City says arena to be transformed into a cultural centre.

8/5/08: Fontvieille and Arles, in France, ban non-lethal bullfights and bar child matador Michelito in south of France.



Some Spanish regions that outlaw bullfights and bull runs: Calonge, Tossa de Mar, Vilamacolum, La Vajol, Canary Islands. In Mexico: Jalapa.

Countries that hold and promote bullfights: Spain, Portugal, France, Mexico, Venezuela, Peru, Colombia, Guatemala, Ecuador, Colombia, Panama, Puerto Rico, USA and Canada (Portuguese style "bloodless bullfights," animals are killed out of the ring), China, Japan

Countries with bans: Malaysia, Chile, Morocco, Argentina, Brazil, Cuba, Denmark, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, New Zealand, United Kingdom

REFERENCES:

www.bullfightingfreeeurope.org
www.wspa.org.uk/wspaswork/bullfighting
www.iwab.org • www.banbloodsports.com