



**INTERVIEW** ▶ Today, in 'L'últim espòiler', we talk to the playwright and screenwriter Agustí Franch, director

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'L'últim espòiler' opens its doors today to Agustí Franch, playwright, screenwriter... and a long etcetera. Current director of well-known audiovisual spaces in the country such as Club Piolet, this year he also saw the film adaptation of his play E Fred que crema, which has been nominated for several awards, reach the big screen. Franch talks to us today about what it means to leave your creation in the hands of another person, the magic formula for sending audiovisual content to children in a didactic way or the importance that this industry is increasingly taking on in Andorra.

**–How does audiovisual come into your life?**

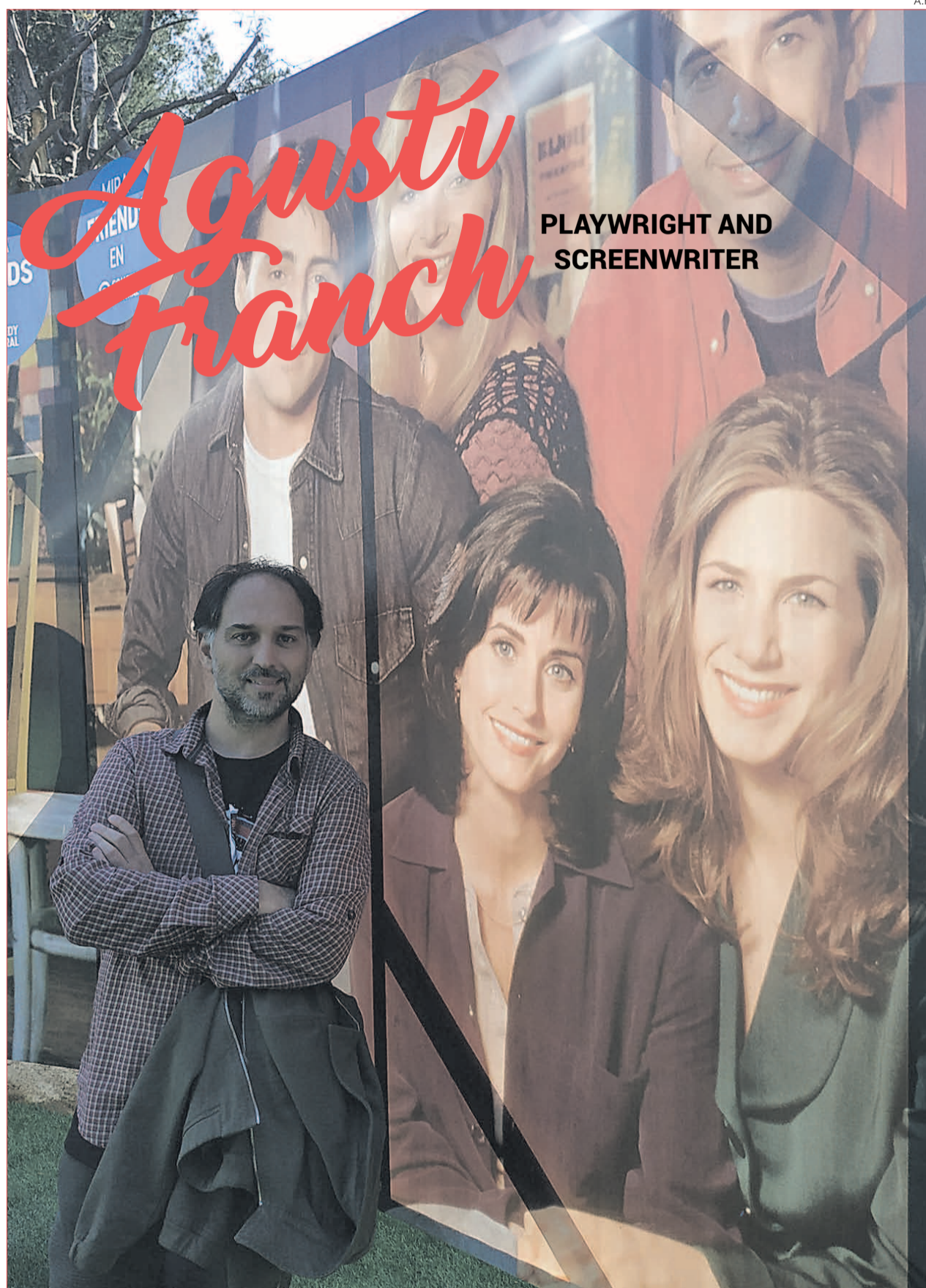
–It was a consequence of wanting to create my own stories. I actually wanted to be an actor and I started doing theater when I was 13 years old, at Petit Espantall in Manresa. I immediately realized that I would have a better time doing the works that I liked than doing the ones that were proposed to me. It was then that, under this intention, I created the company Tr3s and Pro1 at the age of 17 with a group of friends with whom we made works of our own creation. Until one day the stage was too small to make the stories that my head imagined and the logical step was to start writing film and television scripts.

**–Surely you remember that moment when you reaffirmed your passion for this world.**

–Actually, the desire to be an actor came because I wanted to build a luxury hotel in Manresa. Let me explain... Next to Manresa we have Collbaix, a mountain that I had climbed many times since I was a child. One day, going up there with a friend, we imagined that we could build a hotel there for people with great fortunes. It would have its own helipad, stables, the longest escalator in the world and a casino in the shape of a flying saucer (now I know I was an ecological aberration and would chain myself to a tree to prevent anyone from building anything there). We calculated that the construction would cost about 5,000 million of the old pesetas. A short time later I saw that Kim Basinger was getting separated and had to give half of her fortune – about 6 billion dollars – to her ex-husband. She was about 33 years old and I immediately thought: «I'm a better actor than her, if I dedicate myself to it, around the age of 30 I can have the money to build the hotel».

**–And did you succeed?**

–I got into it, but just getting on stage the money and future business disappeared from the plans I had, because the feeling of being up



«A film adaptation of your work is like letting someone else educate your child»

there became a drug from which I could not escape anymore. The first

work was entitled El duc meu-meu, by Xesc Barceló, who coincidentally was the person who, a few years later, would lead me to become a screenwriter for Laura, on TV3.

**–Another of your great successes has been the play 'Fred', which later made the jump to the big screen under the title 'El fred que crema'.**

**Where does this adaptation come from?**

–Everything is given by Joel Pla, an actor closely linked to Andorra and who really wanted to make a play about walkers. He contacted me

and asked me if I wanted to write it, and from the first moment I proposed Fred to do it both on stage and later in the cinema.

**–The film was released last January, four years since the start of filming and with a pandemic even in the middle. I imagine that getting to the day of the premiere was not easy.**

–El fred que crema was released because there were three very stubborn guys in front of us. Every time someone told us that something was not possible, we said: «Understood, but we will continue.» At the time it was already very difficult to get financing and the pandemic made one of the producers want to leave the project, which was really close to falling after the first days of filming. A month after resuming filming, we lost the leading actress, some of the secondary actors, the head of production... Fortunately, Imminent Produccions appeared, another production company from the country that saved the project and with Jose Pozo and Elisabeth Terri at the top, who I believe you also interviewed a few weeks ago in this section. In short, El fred que crema is, in reality, a small miracle.

**–A film or television adaptation is always the result of new additions to the plot and cuts of scenes and sequences on the other hand. As a creator, is it easy to say no to what moments were perhaps important to you?**

–It's very complicated. Not to grow the universe of the work, because you are already aware of this when you do the adaptation, and it also enriches it and is fun. Keep in mind that I directed the play, so I am the author of the original text, the adaptation and the direction of the play. And one day another person arrives, Santi Trullenque in this case, and the characters are no longer as you saw them, there are scenes that lose importance, he wants to explain other things different from what you had in mind, the tone takes a different path very different from the original, etc. It's like letting someone else raise your child. It's hard to let go, but little by little you accept it and put yourself at the service of the story so that there is the best possible result. If I had directed the film it would have been very different, but not better.

**–Together with different figures from the audiovisual world you created 'Red Nose Productions'. Why this production company?**

–Actually, the production company was born out of the need to make Club Piolet. The program is 99% of our work.

**–And how did you come to create this program? If I'm not mistaken, you have been the director and screenwriter since 2013.**

–Indeed, I arrived in Andorra to direct the program. When Ràdio i Televisió d'Andorra decided to outsource it and took over Ordino Studios, Jordi Albà, who was the

manager, called me and said: «If you come to direct it, I'll take it. If not, I say no.» And I didn't think twice, I loved the project and the idea of living in the country.

**-I don't know to what extent there is a certain complicating factor in producing children's content that appeals to the little ones, especially if we take into account all the technological and digital advances that they have today.**

-The content must be differentiated from the medium through which you broadcast it. Working for children's audiences requires getting inside their heads and trying to guess what motivates them, to make things that they like and that are educational at the same time. We don't always succeed, but we try to at least have fun. This requires a great responsibility, which we have always wanted to assume because we have a complicated world and we have to let them know that in a positive and optimistic way. We like to convey values, make them think and arouse their cultural, social, scientific, historical interests... Boys and girls are very critical, they know what they want and you can't deceive them, and that's why we have to be up to their demands. In addition, Club Piolet is an icon of the country, it is part of its identity, and it is a space we want them to feel like their own. That's why we like to hold parties where they meet the characters, make recordings that they can be part of... so that they feel that the screen is not a barrier and that we are flesh and blood, like them. How to get there is another story. It is true that the competition is endless, but we have a secret weapon, which is proximity. Nowhere else than at Club Piolet will they find someone who can tell them about their country and its people. We are unique in this sense.

**-And aside from 'Club Piolet', what other type of content can we find within the production company? Are you focused on a specific type of project?**

-So far we have done children's fiction like Les cosas de la Martina, series projects like Brujas, and some other film stuff. What we want to do in the future, beyond Club Piolet, which makes us very happy, is cinema. The genre? We are not closed to anything because each idea has different needs and we cannot say no to a good story just because we don't feel like making a specific type of film.

**-I imagine, however, that you will have seen each other in the tessitura of saying no also to depending on which projects. As directors or producers, what are the criteria for making this decision?**

-The truth is that foreign projects have rarely come to us. And when they come, we have to reject them because we don't even have the capacity to raise our own, then it becomes impossible to raise those of others. It is true that we are now lin-



ked to Maria Caminal, another of your interviewees, with Cor de dones, but it has been a special case because the story ended up being an original idea of mine and we feel very linked to it. I'm telling you, it's an exception. Since we don't know and will never know what the market wants, the only criterion we have is: «Is the story motivating us? Come in»

**-Let's talk about Andorra. Is there enough commitment to audiovisuals or are there a lack of resources?**

-I think the country is in the process of understanding the possibilities offered by the audiovisual world. There is still a long way to go, and Andorra has the resources it has, but more and more it is being seen that the cinema is not a bottomless well, but offers returns of many kinds to the country. El fred que crema or 42 segons, for example, are films that make people want to come and see the landscapes that appear there. To learn about the history of the country, of those who helped refugees cross the moun-

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tains... In addition, the money that the two projects left in Andorra was much more than the public money that was invested there. There are different formulas to promote industry within the country, the politicians know it and I believe them when they say that there is a will to explore them.

**-It cannot be denied that there is a big problem in the country and that is that many filmmakers are forced to leave our borders in order to open a path in the audiovisual field. Is there really a way around this issue?**

-It's complicated, certainly. Unless we manage for Andorra to become a big platform like the Canaries have done or the Basque Country is now getting there, we will always have to leave here to grow. But that doesn't mean that an entire race has to be thrown out, it can certainly be combined.

**-At what point do you see the audiovisual industry currently being? It seems that it is increasingly difficult to make a place in it.**

-The audiovisual situation is quite confusing nowadays. I would talk for a long time. Right now we're probably at a standstill, waiting to see who will have the money in the future: the platforms, the chains, the governments... We'll see if the theaters manage to survive with a couple of big-grossing films a year. And speaking strictly of television, more of the same. Today there are literally millions of television channels, because every streamer or tik-toker is one, so it will also be necessary to see how the sector evolves.

**-Playwright, screenwriter, theater director... would you be able to stick with just one of these fields?**

-I have come to the conclusion that I am a creator of stories. From here I decide if I make them into a novel, on television, in cinema or in theatre. Yes, it is true that, as far as theater direction is concerned, I do it very occasionally.

**-I imagine that the differences when working in these areas are more than obvious, but which would perhaps be the most noteworthy?**

-Proximity with the public. When it comes to showing it, the theater has an adrenaline rush that the cinema doesn't. In addition, you know that a function is unrepeatable and exclusive, and the 300 people in the room are the only ones who will experience that moment. This is magical. And the novel for me is surely the most intimate and personal of all, because whoever reads it is involved in the story, putting faces to the characters and imagining the spaces.

**-A last spoiler of your next work that can come early?**

-From here I can say that, if nothing changes, my time of writing novels has already passed. "L'home que feia núvols de sucre", published a couple of years ago, was the last. ≡