

DEL ARTE Y LA NATURALEZA EN ESPAÑA.

ON ART AND NATURE.

The Spanish art interest in nature is, and has being, a way of longing for Paradise. For a country which has been a fresh garden and is becoming a desert, water and fire are the very elements of construction, destruction and deconstruction. And to this two elements directs their interest the artist-gardener (strictly speaking we cannot talk about land-art), they dominate water to create freshness in the high heat or they aesthetizise burnt, charcoal land. But after and before, the art in/with nature means, mainly, total art, in the sense that it evolves in space and time and all the human senses.

This trend started with the arabic gardens of Al-Andalus. In the *Sura* number 2, *aleyá* 25 it is said: announce the good news to those who believe and do good. They will have gardens under which the water will spring. The garden is then *al-channa*, the Paradise, so it has to contain all needs of life, practical and spiritual. The water makes earth alive, the vegetation that comes out of it gives food and shadow and makes human life possible, and all the delights derived from this two elements; the music of water, the rapture of the smells and colours of fruits and plants. In the cloister vegetation is always related with food needs - orange trees, olives, limes, figues, etc. all that is needed for subsistence in an arabs mind. The flower plants will be spices and aromatics and all this plants and trees, which blossom at different seasons, will be carefully ordered to give a constant delight to the sense of smell. Colour is the single non ordered element of the garden, the bit of chaos permitted in ones inner life, the rest is geometrical ordered to differentiate the inner security from the outside danger. Order versus chaos, inner security versus outside danger, paradise versus common world. If you add the *huries* - I'm afraid there is no male gender for this last garden element - to all this, no doubt it is good for eternity. It is a mystical way of constructing a garden and it has a mystical purpose, very close to the modern aesthetic purpose.

The first characteristic of this gardens - Alhambra, Generalife, Medina Azahara... - is that they are built in the inside part of the palaces, hidden from the outside sight. So they are closed and impenetrable from the outside, hermetic

and they are relatively small in size but they grow big to the eye with their wise use of perspectives. We may say that the arab garden is the search of the Paradise in the deepest of the self, the possibility of constructing a space in contrast to the open extension of the outside desert, so the feeling of the garden had to be that of peace and quietness, the disorder, the wild, the dangerous being always outside. Simple and austere order which is translated into a rectangular shape and into strait lines, and is also shown in the little quantity of water they use, being such a scarce element. Those are gardens which contain a lot of water but do not need a lot of it to grow and live. A symbol of mystical inner life, done with the aim of balancing interior meditation with the just appreciation of the environment stressing the contrast between the esplendorous and the recollect. The water permits the creation of an axis which makes possible to organize the space. The pounds, the water, the rumour of the water is the music of the garden because it is not only sound, it is rhythmic sound. That is why I speak of total art, not only because they are thinking of inner life but, also, because it is an art that involves all our senses in a single unity which is complexely compound. They involve the sight as pictorial art -the organized nature and the arabesques or ornaments- the smell which is compound as another complex unity which can be perceived as such unity or in the different parts it is compound of. You can individualized each aroma or smell them together just as you can do with a musical chord, it involves the sense of hearing because the chopping of the water has different strength and rhythm and you can hear it almost in every corner of the garden and the patios. And I say almost because like in the music, the silence is part of the sound of nature and those gardens have always places where the silence is present and, lastly, it involves the sense of feeling because the freshness of the garden, the shadow of the trees in the middle of a desertic heat makes you shiver with pleasure.

No wonder this images have remain along the centuries in the mind and mythologies of arabic people as a longing for Paradise - as we can see in the Sirian film " Les balisiers du désert" where they speak of the Garden of Granada, meaning the Garden of Paradise and symbolizing it with a peace of mirror; the symbol of water in the desert. No wonder it has spread along other art styles and genders and into ordinary language metaphors. In Sevilla, when Curro Romero gets a really good *lidia* (bull-fight), the music stops, the public refrain their breaths, the deepest silence is heard and this is understood as the authentic music of Nature and in this silence, art becomes Nature. When this happens in Sevilla they say "se ha hecho jardín el albero", the sand of the bull-fight ring has become a garden, the desert has become a oasis, water has blossom in fire.

With the same purpose but opposite elements we have Chillida's inorganic garden, "*Los peines del viento*" (The wind combs). Mysticism,

mythology and metaphor in a perceptually complex environment constructed to train the senses and the spirit through observation and meditation. As an outdoor church to glorify God through Nature. This environment is located in San Sebastián, at the north of Spain, far from muslim and greek cultures but penetrated by both of them -arabs never reached the north of Spain but Fatima's hand, as a symbol of good luck, hangs as a door-knocker as north as the south of France. Ubicated in a geographical and cultural crossroad summarizes cultures and myths in a never finished always changin work. The geometrical basic shape is a triangle, symbol of god for christianity and the number of Tao as well. The basic number of endless change. It stands in a rocky sea side at the entrance of a bay where the Cantabric sea waves break with strength. Perceptual complexity comes from natural ever changin elements like sea, air and light with their endless combinations for all human senses plus the combined significant elements of myths. The three airon pieces, like crooked tridents, comb the air, its opposite, producing sound and referring to the idea of those ladies or mermaids who, while singing and combing themselves raise strong wind which makes men lose their way. This is said of the greek mermaid, the goose keeper of fairy tales and is also asociated with basque witchcraft - semi-goddesses asociated with the wind, while Maya the main goddess is asociated with lighthning, fire. Inverting the elements wind-comb /comb-wind signalizes the inverted images or ideas of mermaids since in basque mythology a mermaid is not a blond lady-sardine but a whale, that whale that save Jonas in her belly, like a mother, like mother earth. Thus whale mermaid is present in the straustructure in the holes we find on the stone floor through with springs the pressuriced sea sounding very much like whale-fountains, the iron tridents hissing, the whalelike holes whistling and the sound of wind and waves composes the music of this work. Fishing whales and forging iron are the two traditions of basque workmen. Water and fire in pre-mythical times. In saying so I'm not trying to desagree with Octavio Paz when he says that Chillida's works do not allude to history or mythology, because they go to the elementary sources underlying those myths, because "its protagonists are forces and elements", that which is premythical. in this very sense I understand Chillida's mysticism. It is so that I speak of *Peine del viento* as a site for meditation and its naive brother, play -the city children combat the sea stepping the holes and, unluckilly for their mothers, getting completely wet. Standing by in the middle of a storm is another way of feeling the feeling of it, we are again in a place wich concerns smell, touch, sense of hearing and sight, in a material and spiritually total art object. The result of searching the contained energy of the movement between opposites and the space in the rumour of the limits for lastly encountering the "inner space" enclosed within the outer space. For as Octavio Paz said "Space is not outside us nor is it merely an extension: it is that in which

we exist, we are the space in which we are, space is a battle-ground with countless combatants. That is the way I understand Chillida's phrase "the work of art as a sole 'optimum' dimension.

Another two gardens related to natural opposite forces, that of fire, have been created in Spain, one in the volcanic island of Tenerife which spreads all over the island in several complementing sites and the other in the deep forests of the north. The same mythical purpose animates them not because they search premythical elements but, because they transform catastrophe into resurrection. Aesthetizing burnt lava and charcoal forest they intend to humanize inhabitable landscapes. Cesar Manrique sizes the abrupt forms and rough texture of lava bubbles and starts a dialectical battle with them trying to seek their essence. With a formalistic intention he develops forms with, on and within the volcanic caves of Tenerife, the land of fire, building from what fire gives you as a destruction-creation dynamic movement. Huge and small rocky bubbles are seen not as lunar but as human spaces. Music halls, microclimates, velvederes to the unlimited, the fury of earth transform into a home. Nature made architecture. Don't destroy land to build houses on, defend it, accept her architecture as a present and inhabit it. That's the aim. He tries to apprehend her forms and complete Nature's work. Manrique's renaissance character follows the bases of idealism, considering nature's beauty and imperfection to recreate that harmony which will complete Beauty. Like the arabs he is looking for a humanly habitable place, in contrast he does not work hermetical sweet domesticity but wild open habitacles. His work stays somewhere between the classical search of beauty and the romantic love of nature's violence. His aim is to pursue the formalistic idea of saving men through art by making him live in art. This is, I believe, another way of looking for the Paradise, a more secular paradise, nearer to the marxist idea of general wellfare.

In this same line worked Agustin Ibarrola his living and dead forests. He comes from a peculiar social realism or "protest art" as we use to call it and does not search for the essence of things, he simply pursues freedom, freedom from materials and topics when he created the living forest of Oma, full of tuning-hiding people, refuges, contrabandists, perhaps, people who try to scape the acid rain of atomic era -Guernika in on view- searchers of freedom. But I am not now interested in his living forest, where he planted a picture in Nature following Chagall's idea, so much as in the last burnt forest and the relation between them, the dialectical movement of yin-yang, life-death, catastrophe-resurrection they imply. Far from the art for art's sake search of forms he tries to improve humankind and seeks and works with traces of the past and the gravitation of the future on present. The movement between opposites does not become anymore inner space, it becomes time. Time is needed for action and

action for development. A man is a subject but mankind is Nature and he speaks not to a few but to a great community to mankind as an indissoluble element of nature. Social, ecological, ephemeral ever changing art. In this sense he is working with forces, he does not alter them, he only emphasises the already existing rhythms. He seeks freedom through apphiness and happiness through appearances, following Keats poem "a thing of Beauty is a joy forever". This joy is possible when opposites are present and changing one into the otherone, like in the *argizatola*, a votive basque lamp wich is a piece of wood representing a living man in one side and in the opposite one the same man dead and the wax candle round the middle. Those two forests are the *argizatola* and the fire is the votive sacrifice to action. Instead of a work for the pleasure and exercise of the senses, Ibarrola creates action to make time possible. Action that transform the objective conditions, that change burnt silent colourless landscape into a living piece of art. After the fire only a dead cosmos of calcination is left. The pure forms of stones, previously hidden under vegetation, show suddenly and the artist, going back to the original, transform them into petroglyphes in an action that recuperates and registers the evolutive processes. The construction of archives as a symbol of time. The construction of time as a symbol of modern postindustrial man.

They all make art with Nature. They are all concern with actual worries; lack of water and loss of vegetation, desertitation due to fire - while writing this text I have in sight one of the innumerable fires constantly devastating the country. Part of cape La Nao's natural park is just becoming just charcoal. They all create plastic syntax and visual metaphores. And they all concern, in one way or another, with the idea of paradise. I'm not sure if this is or not land art but I suspect it has lot to do with the spanish tradition of landscape and still-life painting. The water gardens are musical garden, the fire ones are silent gardens.

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