

TRANSGOTHIC ART AS A MOVEMENT

By Iliá Galán, published as an article: *Empiurema*, nº 31, Orihuela, 2005

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//p. 65//It may seem amusing that in the 21st century a group of artists should appear and declare itself against the situation of contemporary art, symbolically attacking a corner of the Prado Museum with brute force. Now that everything in art seems possible, when we are sick of supposed novelties and scandals, when we have read one thousand manifestos from old avant-garde movements, a handful of creators appear, playing up like children, ironically claiming the freedom to be sensible in art, demanding a return to its very spirit. The group was introduced while some of its members appeared attacking Moneo's Cube, an emblem of a supposed modernity, already old and even vulgar, which was built after damaging the austere Cloister of the Jerónimos in Madrid.

On the seventh of March 2005, the action took place: an attack on a shoddy emblem, something which does not harmonise with its surroundings in any way but is being paid for by everyone. However, only a few members of the Transgothic group turned up there and some did not agree with this action for its deliberateness. Dressed in black, in mourning for the death of the arts, their aim was that a group of artists should represent the resurrection of art, appearing in a queue. Armed with spades and pickaxes, while a voice cried out, "Down with the banalisation of art!" the rest responded, like an ancient Greek chorus, "Transcendence". The "magic" word having been uttered, pickaxes, spades and sledgehammers descended rhythmically, making it clear that the controversial architecture was being symbolically demolished.

This action and the slogan were repeated seven times. Thus, a number of Transgothics vented their anger on the cosy position of those who now make their living by imposing their artistic rules on everyone else; the elderly avant-garde with their dogmatic attitudes – now tucked away in academies and universities, toothless old rockers with crutches, just like the people *they* criticised when *they* were trying to have a revolution. The revolutionary took power and became the oppressor. The motive behind this act was to present the group's philosophy - still being formulated - to the press, radio and TV. It was not so much a question of going against Moneo's "Cube" and even less so against the architect and his work, on occasions extremely meritorious, but more an attack against the insipid world of the arts today.

In fact those who participated were only a few of the members of this group with such a striking name - only seven in total: Fernando Sánchez Dragó, Modesto Trigo, Santi Vega, Amador Braojos, Gonzalo Sánchez, Javier Ruiz and Iliá Galán. There were even members who were against the action for different reasons, since it went against a national symbol; or because of its bellicose nature; or because it did not commit itself to something very sensitive around which, as we have seen later, there is a pact of state to keep silent, etc. Nevertheless, the action was motivated fundamentally by the presentation of the manifesto, which has brought together artists of all nature of styles and trends, some especially important due to their investment in modernity and the new trends.

Amongst the signatories of that document there are even some members of the San Fernando Royal Academy of Fine Arts, mixed with artists of lesser fame. Among these are writers and poets, such as Fernando Sánchez Dragó, Julio Llamazares, Eugenia

Rico, Irene Zoe Alameda, Manuel Pérez Petit, Francisco Javier Satué, Joaquín Lledó, Rosa Pereda, Marcos-Ricardo Barnatán, Herminio Andújar, Xabier Sánchez de Amoraga y de Garnica, Marcello Ramadori, Gustavo Vidal, Miguel Losada, José Luis Zerón Huguet and Iliá Galán; painters and photographers such as Carlos Franco, Manuel Franquelo, José Hernández, Franco Venanti, Modesto Trigo, María Verdugo Althöfer, Julio Castellano, José Sánchez-Carralero, Franco Venanti, Maria Teresa Cattaneo, Frangkiskos Bizas, Francisco Higuera, José María Solitario, Francisca Blázquez, Manuel Ruiz and María José Martínez; composers and musicians such as Tomás Marco, Juan Manuel Ruiz, Javier Paixariño, Octavio Vázquez, Santi Vega and Cecilia Mercadal; sculptors such as Amador Braojos, Gonzalo Sánchez Mendizábal, Antonio Alvarado, Alberto Bañuelos-Fournier, Paz Santos; gallery owners and critics such as Gustavo Cuccini, Yago Sánchez Echebarría, Joan Lluís Montane, and architects such as Jesús Mateo Pinilla.//p. 66//

Apart from the event which publicised the manifesto, what they most agreed on was a rebellion against the despotic dominance of the cultural elite; the commercialisation of the arts and the loss of the spiritual dimension of art. A form of necessary transcendence for a civilisation lost in consumerism. Many of them were also appealing for beauty, without abandoning the dimension of the sublime, taking as a symbol the art which built cathedrals, where no supposed genius stood out over the others, and where, moreover, all forms of art flowed together as in a “total work”. Artists – they said – must serve the people and at the same time seek harmony from chaos, just as monstrous gargoyles and stained glass windows full of light flow together in a cathedral.

And the fact is that the Transgothics aim to provide an artistic solution for the spiritual desert which surrounds us. This is what was inferred, in general terms, from the group’s first writings and meetings, where there was disparity of opinion and even of approach over some aspects of the manifesto itself which some had supported. But this movement, which aims to place itself at the vanguard of this century and millennium now beginning, with a renewed vision of the world of art, where did it come from?

Really it arose from the essence of some heated debates between a number of its members, specifically in the so-called *Tertulia de los Doce* (literary circle of the Twelve) attended by extremely diverse artists, some of whom were not signatories of the manifesto but do agree with it, as in the case of the writer and philosopher Ignacio Gómez de Liaño, or the poet Diego Valverde Villena, amongst others. It is true that the original idea had been engendered at the end of the last millennium, in the heat of some Napoleon **cognac**, between the composer Juan Manuel Ruiz and the poet and philosopher Iliá Galán, although then only sketchily, and which the latter put into writing as the first manifesto. The name itself was fundamental, as it underlined, above all, the importance of *trans*, a prefix which slides away and takes us onward to something different.

Apart from the above, this implied understanding art in a strong sense, as a necessary element in our societies which leads to an internal elevation. From the idea of the Gothic came a return - not to a past in many ways much worse than our present – but to the idea of the cathedral; the sacred which impregnates the profound artistic experience, and of building together where, rather than individual geniuses, it is the group that is important; the idea of constructing the temple jointly where the arts flow in unison. From the Gothic came the idea of working together for the use of a society, constructing

a divine palace for all the inhabitants of our world; something which would uplift us, but also with the coexistence of terrible elements (gargoyles, infernos, monsters....) alongside the angelic beauty of the celestial world (virgins, saints, etc.).

We refer, therefore, to the two variants of the Gothic which were later experienced in the so-called Gothic writers, such as the novelists of the 19th century - for example Lewis and his morbid Recreation in *The Monk* - and others who yearned for this from a different viewpoint, such as Goethe or Victor Hugo. In addition, the architectural style of the Gothic and its neogothic variants have been lavishly dealt with by a large part of the world, produced in medieval times from Seville and Orihuela to Nuremberg, Westminster, Lincoln or Cambridge; from Sicily to Krakow or Prague, from Israel, Rhodes, Cyprus or Nicosia to Roskilde in Denmark or Uppsala in Sweden. In other words, a style which links almost all Europe but which later, like Neogothic, extends all over the world, not only in buildings, such as the cathedral of Saint Patrick in New York and other similar ones in all continents, but also in film and particularly the classic horror films.

Finally, as it was not a question of going back to the Gothic and, moreover, for that purpose there was a neogothic architecture, the term related that architecture not only to current architecture but also to that aesthetic trend - with their black dresses and striking suits, their pallid made-up skin - through which the members again adopt those airs of Ridley Scott's *Blade Runner*; that multiethnic and multicultural world of skyscrapers, New York Manhattan style. Nevertheless, it is not the Gothic, either as regards style or a world to imitate, which is being sought but rather that everything wishes to underline the prefix "trans". **All this includes a hearty laugh; an ironic touch to match these terms with a post-modern air, even if, in contrast, one goes very seriously into the artistic variety of each creator:** some of them painting in oil and others doing installations with computing resources, like ciberart or sculpture in bronze, with poems or novels, technological or tribal music, violins or synthesisers etc.,

The most curious thing is that this movement, which began as a bet between a group of artists who were friends, now has increasingly more members and claims more interest, also abroad. Perhaps the sign of the times needed something like that.

The first manifesto, i.e. what everything began with, was as follows:

TRANSGOTHIC

Reviving the strong spirit of those who made cathedrals possible does not necessarily mean repeating their ideas or works of art, although some, if they so wished, could do so. This is not a neogothic movement like the one in the 19th century, just as there could be a neoclassicism. This is a transcending - but starting from the greatness of what is inside which one can achieve through art. Going beyond what surrounds us in order that artistic objects are the Other, since they do not exist as simple things, and what is important is the subject; what others call the spirit of art; what happens in us when we find ourselves before a great creator, through his works, and we feel him, we experience him. The key to understanding art is in experiencing it deeply, creating it or recreating it within each one of us.

1. The scenario at the end of the 20th and beginning of the 21st century is that of a great market of forms, often worn out and without content, of repeated vanguard movements and academicism which still wishes to impose itself, reducing art to things which appear in museums, things which are read and sold, things which are listened to. The Temple of Solomon, where the arts grew, in other times so glorious, has been desecrated by the merchants, and one cannot see a Christ who is throwing them out, whipping them. Nor is anyone crucified. The scandals disappeared due to their proliferation, like a plague. The grey attempts to spread in a world of things. But if art does not exist like things amongst things, artists *do* exist and those that *feel* these artists through their works, their spirit and their strength.

"In a reality where scientific and technological advances occur at the speed of light, alienating and full of vital contrasts, in the kingdom of the practical and functional, where it is difficult to find moments for inward reflection, the "Transgothic" emerges almost telluric as an alternative to our current environment, wishing to contribute a renewed sensitivity where the dreamlike, the irrational and the hidden occupy their deserved spatial-temporal dimension in artistic expression."

2. In a market like that there is no place for selling the mystery, as the mystery flees from the moneygrubbers. But the mystery may be a key, a key lost from the world of art, as it has always been. If the sacred does not reappear, the sacredness which enables us to see in an object a work of art - what the artist achieves - everything will be diluted in a magnum of undifferentiated things, without any meaning. The world today, when in the West religions have lost their force and there are no mythologies which have replaced them, as Marxism was at the time, demands meaning and dreams, and these also come from//p.67// the hand of the arts, from their way of bringing beauty or the sublime, discovering for us another dimension in the world we live in. The sacred, which before inhabited the sanctuary, is born again in the hands of the artist and those who are impacted by its verb, sound, colour, volume, film or whatever.
3. The transgothic as a metaphor, along with the symbol of the stained glass windows full of light and colour, its mystery, the height of fine, sculpted towers, also includes the dark face of its chapels, the gargoyles of the monsters. One returns to the beauty, but the dark face of the world is not rejected, although the hand is not given to the claw to gloat in the horror but rather to transmute through art that dreadful dimension of our existence. In other times the Gothic was not just a set of angels but also of devils; not only the praying maiden but also the fornicating monk, heretic and persecuted. Today the world is a different place but the horror and the angelic continue to lie in the same bed, reproducing their bastards all over the world. The harmony sought is not so much external as internal; what underlies everything; the peace which flows beneath the contradictions. The harmony of chaos.
4. The transgothic does not include so many artists who relive in themselves something of what is gothic, no; rather they use it as a metaphor, either to make music which makes up sounds of other countries and worlds, painting which brings together traces of other continents and lively colours, such as those of the

stained glass or sifted like those of sculpted stone, classical sculptures with Greek rules or broken like the other face of order. Order and chaos, but not as a game only, as a profound action. The transgothic movement “unites different artistic manifestations with an agglutinating vision, creative and open, where avant-garde movements and postmodernism coexist.”

5. Transgothic, although internalised and hidden at times, includes tough social criticism of a world of flat consumerism with no horizons, and for that reason it rises to the highest of the towers to see the furthest the eyes can reach. Beauty seduces, and what is tragic or violent struggles against a comfortable world, overweight and half asleep in front of a television set, against thoughts acquired in the hypermarket. On the other hand, art returns to the people, but with its dignity, not as things but as life which resounds in the observer. The artist, if he is no longer an envoy from heaven or a missionary, at least he is someone who has something to say, which is said for the good of others. Art is not a decoration, something dispensable, but rather an understanding of the world, of each world; and also of death and life.
6. Transgothic returns to the subject, the unity, not as a genius who devastates the world but as an internal artist who extracts the expression from himself and is given to others, achieving unity from division. The fragmented and fallen is taken up again in the unit of a ruin, or new buildings are made.
7. The transgothic is a hurricane which feeds off evil and good, off ugliness and beauty in order to transcend it, without any restriction, beyond any law, a volcano which exploits a sensitivity of infiniteness, in a nexus with Everything. Any style is possible, any form, since it flees from pure formalism to go to the essences, and one same author may be several at the same time. He can take or create symbols or not, he may enter into the mysteries of the world or not, and rescue nature - today becoming extinct - to extend its rain forests across the deserts of the spiritual world which surrounds us.

The third manifesto, since the second was manifested only internally, consisted of seeking seven points which would more clearly unite the signatories on all points, but also avoid the distortion which occurred in the first case in some media, provoking misunderstanding over the first manifesto. For this reason something short and clear was sought, though suggestive and metaphorical, a synthesis of the previous one, avoiding negation and attack and seeking the affirmative:

TRANSGOTHIC MANIFIESTO III

1. The transgothic artists unite to construct the metaphor of the great cathedral of the arts.¹
2. Art, bearer of values which transcend the market². Reveals another dimension.

¹ Lunar reference.

² Here we could recall the text by Antonio Machado where he says that only idiots confuse price with value. It is not a question of negating the market but of better using it and transcending it, going beyond

3. Art, more than an ornament³. It transmutes existence.
4. Art, a mystery which explains a mysterious world.⁴
5. Art, harmonies from chaos.
6. Art, creator of meaning.
7. The transgothic artists wish to fertilize the desert which surrounds us.⁵

the economic even if one must pass through it i.e. the laws of economy are not those of art, the kingdom of freedom.

³ It is not a question of eliminating decoration, as often the things most necessary for life are apparently the most superficial ones, but rather of pointing out that it may be much more than a decoration in the sense of something dispensable. However, we should bear in mind that many decorations are not dispensable and may even be essential.

⁴ Venusian or venereal reverence? Saturnine or attributed to Jupiter?

⁵ Solar reference.