

“Touristified” domesticity. The house museums of Salvador Dalí and César Manrique.

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Abstract:

When tourists visit a house museum, we do not only examine works of art, but rather scrutinize an infrequent domestic space. Considering the house museums of Salvador Dalí (Portlligat) and César Manrique (Taro de Tahiche) we will analyze how tourists with our predatory and perverse peeking, notice decoration, furniture, interior and exterior spaces and, above all, the outstanding environment surrounding these homes. The authentic objects that once pertained to the artists, together with the inherited spatial experience, will thus turn into desire object and example for our own dwellings. Turning the house of an artist, or any other famous person, into a museum implies 'touristifying' its domesticity.

Keywords: Domesticity, Tourism, House museum, Salvador Dalí, César Manrique.

Why are some of the most visited touristic decoys, paradoxically, private homes, most times belonging to a deceased famous artist? Is it because of the curiosity we all feel when we scour and scrutinize the intimacy of noted and famous characters? Because the artists inhabiting them left a peculiar and bland domestic legacy that encourages our ghoulish instincts? Anyhow, it is a fact that these homes, now museums, have turned into an increasingly demanded tourist attractions with great commercial success.

When we visit a house museum we don't go exclusively to examine the artist's works of art. We attend to observe a rather unusual domestic space: a peculiar way of life. Indeed, in these museums, tourists, with our predatory and perverse peeking, notice decoration, furniture, objects and, above all, the outstanding spaces and landscapes where they are poised: in other words, with the most unusual things. Their strangeness therefore becomes our focus of interest.

There are many house museums of artists, writers, musicians, collectors and obviously, architects¹. However, two of the most world renowned and visited were inhabited by two very famous Spanish artists: Salvador Dalí (1904-1989) and César Manrique (1919-1992). These houses will therefore be, the study case of this essay. Dalí's house museum, at Portlligat, established on a group of former

¹ For example: Monet in Giverny, Rembrandt in Amsterdam, Miró in Mallorca, Frida Kahlo's blue house in Coyoacán, Marc Chagall in Niza, Pablo Neruda in San Antonio, Mario Praz in Roma, John Soane in Londres, Luis Barragán in México D.F. and a long so on.

fishermen barracks, inhabited and enlarged by the artist and Gala from 1930 to 1972. César Manrique's house museum, the current seat of his foundation, at Taro de Tahiche, Lanzarote, where the artist likewise, from an existing rural house, enlarged it from 1968 to 1992 by fitting the volcanic bubbles beneath it.

Both houses hosting also the artists' ateliers, have common features. On the one side, they both seat on privileged surroundings, inspiring a large part of the painters' artistic production, the dwellings themselves and their contexts where very inspiring for their works. On the other hand, both Dalí and Manrique conceived and planned the extensions on their own, without architects nor projects. Interventions that where extended during a long time: forty years in Dalí's case and twenty-four in Manrique's².

While their artistic production is very different, the houses they inhabited and conceived are comparable. They both reveal their domestic habits, their ideas on domestic space and the relations with the context, as well as some significance on their aesthetic ideas: but, above all, because they are the object of the curiosity and pilgrimage of millions of tourists who have visited them since they became museums: "touristified" domestic spaces³. Let's begin with the first visit: The house museum of Salvador Dalí.

When arriving to Portlligat Bay, the visitor faces Dalí's house museum. Until then everything is normal: to the right, there still is a small group of fishermen houses: and to the left, the impressive landscape of the bay, inspiring a countless amount of the artist's paintings. However we are shocked by a cypress sprouting from the inside of a boat planted in the middle of the street, in front of the house. Despite its run down condition, it seems that this boat, placed besides the other ones, could set out to sea at any time. It is not by chance that the pole of ships is called tree, and this cypress could well be its spars. A ghostly image thus, receives the tourists, anxious about scrutinize the private space once inhabited by Dalí and Gala⁴. (Figures 1 y 2)

Out of the seventeen parts that make up the tour around Dalí's house museum, this essay will focus solely on those domestic spaces that generate greater awe among visitors (at least in my own experience). I refer to the areas of the terrace, the backyard garden and the pool. Exterior spaces that

² The history on the different additions and extensions of the house in Portlligat has been compiled by Clos, O. (1996) and Pitxot, A. and Aguer, M. (2004). See the comparative analysis of the house museum and the Theater-museum of Figueres and the Castle at Púbol by Granell, E. (1996). For the history and description of Manrique's house see Marchán Fiz, S. (1996).

³ I warn you that I am well aware, and so is the tourist, that all the museum houses are shown partially empty of the belongings of those inhabiting them. However, photographs from the time are usually hung showing how they were really inhabited, they also provide a strong impact on the visitor and, above all, an opportunity to imagine how they were lived. Said photographs are thus essential in the configuration of the ideas or images that the visitor makes up of the visited museum house.

⁴ The image of the cypress and the boat was the main theme of a picture by Dalí titled "Apparition of my cousin Carolinetta in the beach of Rosas (fluid premonition)", from 1933.



actually captivate us due to the beauty of the surrounding landscape, the unusual objects strangely placed in them, and above all, for one imagines about the good life enjoyed there⁵.

The terrace, for example, is built in 1948, when Dalí and Gala acquired the third barrack where they installed the library. Given the fact that this one is placed on a level above all other barracks and, specially, because it opens sideways to the olive tree on the hill, the terrace became one of the most frequented spaces on their daily life. This balcony towards the bay also unveiled their *Via Lactea* (Milky Way), the pomegranate tree flanked path that borders the seaside towards a small creek called Platja d'En Sisó. This way the house extended along the whole shoreline of Portlligat and the existing olive tree, which was filled with amphorae, vases, columns, and other singular objects. (Figures 3 and 4)

Another relevant space of the house, moreover placed on the open air, is the backyard patio. Dalí isolated it from the existing olive tree through a stepped wall. In this patio, the center of the Dalí's social life besides the pool, we find two wild olive trees planted on large flower pots resembling coffee cups. (Figure 5) Again, resembling an apparition, or like Alice in Wonderland, we can imagine that these could be lift off the ground to change their position. This way, the vegetable elements seem to have no roots. The decontextualized cypress and the wild olives become then surrealist objects: in objects coming out of Dalí's paranoid deliriums.

The open spaces are, like the interior of the house, decorated with different and heterogeneous objects, curiosities, and dull objects besides peculiar ones. For example, the patio's toilet-lamp, the pool's telephone booth, and a large amount of "as found objects" which Dalí consciously placed to provoke

⁵ The exterior spaces surrounding the house are also mentioned by Tusquets, O. (2003) as those preferred by Dalí: "Oddly enough, out of the many hours I spent in this house, most of them will be spent in the patio, the pool or the artist's atelier. Although I will have the occasion of visiting the other rooms, we will hardly ever sit down to chat in any of them, and as bright the outdoor spaces will seem to me, the indoor will seem dark, asphyxiating, humid and gloomy".

his guests. Therefore, Dalí placed both usual objects as well as, the trees themselves out of their context.



Let's visit next, César Manrique's house. If we find rather strange bumping into a cypress tree inside a boat, in Portlligat, it is not very common either to find the treetop of a palm tree and an avocado rising from the core of the earth. This unusual episode is found by the visitor in the access courtyard to Manrique's house. The situation changes when we remember we are in Lanzarote. It then has a certain

logic. On the one side, because there are many cavities and volcanic bubbles in the underground, created naturally and due to the hundreds of craters on the island. On the other side, and due to the strong trade winds battering the land, trees cannot grow on a vertical axis if they are not protected⁶. (Figures 6 y 7) We can now understand the unusual position of the trees that are welcoming us in Manrique's house.



Therefore, in a similar way to what happens in Dalí's house, trees anticipate some of the characteristics of the outstanding architecture we are about to come across: a house made up of two opposite but complementary space types. Over the surface of the lot, the cubic and rational spaces. In the underground, the wild grotto-like spaces, occupied, connected and fitted to expand his unconventional villa below ground⁷.

Nevertheless, the artist attempted to make the volcanic bubbles more humane planting trees in every one of them. For example, an avocado tree, in the one holding that name. A palm tree in the white one. A fig tree in the red one, which dried out⁸. (Figure 8) Banana trees in the black one, and another fig

⁶ The insidious wind of Lanzarote ends up bending the trees with its vigor and determination. César Manrique himself painted a piece titled "Wind" where the power of a gale is depicted both on people and trees, and in the landscape in general. An example of how to protect plants from this persistent atmospheric agent is found in the overwhelming work of the "socos"—holes where vines are grown, in La Geria, surrounded by ring shaped volcanic rock walls. The dry rock construction (with no mortar) and the ring shape make the walls wind resistant thus alleviating the pressure on the plants.

⁷ Manrique describes the finding of the volcanic bubbles below his house in the following manner: "In my investigations during the time of my recent contact with lava, I found five volcanic bubbles where my astonishment fulfilled my imagination introducing myself into its interior, hanging down from the fig tree growing out of its interior. Inside this first bubble I felt like being in another dimension, realizing the grand works of art conceived by nature. Right there, in its interior, I understood I could turn them into living spaces, starting to plan my future house viewing its magic, its poetry, and at the same time its functionality with great clarity. When coming out of its intimacy and its great silence, I had to make a great effort to go back into a reality that had ran away from me". Quote from Marchán Fiz, S. (1996): 21.

⁸ The fig tree is placed in the center of the red bubble and its branches search for the light penetrating through a small central hole in the lava dome. Its position and shape go together with the circular floor plan of this volcanic cave. Although the fig tree dried up, its trunk and some branches have remained occupying the center of the room. Manrique surrounded it with a circular pedestal like table to eat on and from the branches he hung wicker birds. Thus the fig trees still hosts life after its death.

tree which is still alive in the yellow one. This underground spaces were connected through corridors dug out in the basalt of volcanic lava. Another bigger roofless bubble, known in the Canary Islands as *jameo*, was destined as a social leisure space placing there the fountain pool, the barbeque, and an open air dining room. As we can see, a space with similar intentions to the one built by Dalí at his home in Portlligat.



Manrique initially solved the connection between this underground cavities and the ground floor through a single spiral staircase placed between the red and yellow bubbles. This connection was placed in the center of the main living room, true spatial center and, therefore, distributor of both juxtaposed spaces. (Figure 9) Years later, the artist added two more exterior staircases, one of them landing in the white bubble connecting the artist's atelier with the landscaped garden. (Figure 10) By allowing multiple connections, the house is perceived as a placed formed by rooms and intersections, disorienting whoever enters it, making it difficult to spot the exit, except for the signals that go along the visitor on its special trip.

The trees, therefore, help us to orient ourselves during the tour, since they belong to the two domestic realms at the same time: the tree trunk lies in the volcanic bubble, and the branches, leaning out of the whole like green flames, on the ground floor or the land's surface. However, it is the trees that in a certain way make the life below ground possible. In fact, the trees filter, through their foliage, the intense solar radiation, offering thus a half-light area and micro-climate in each one of the five bubbles. On the other hand, the trunks organize around them the domestic activities taking place there. Therefore Manrique accomplished to blend two housing types: the home conventionally ordered following the usual domestic functions with an atavistic home, with caves sheltering its inhabitants from the wind, the sun, and foreigner's sight⁹. Two houses then, one above ground and the other one

⁹ See the interest of some architects and artists in building cave like homes for themselves, spaces where prehistoric lifestyles blend in with the tombs themselves, Ábalos, I (2006).

buried under it, coexisting, simultaneously inhabited although absolutely opposite in their idiosyncrasy.



End of the tour. However, I would like to continue with some reflections related to these two brief visits.

The two artists built their own houses, but they also exercised as architects in many other occasions. They did not do it in the same way that a trained architect would, but obeying to urges and need of their own vital moments. Their homes were not an architectural project as such but life projects built in an unusual manner. Therefore unfinished projects or open works. Homes that were only finished once the life of their inhabitants ended.

Although both homes rely on the iconography of the popular architecture of their respective cultures, in any case, they are very thoughtful and scarcely conservationist of the authenticity or originality of the primitive constructions they acquired. Indeed, neither Dalí nor Manrique felt restricted to maintain or magnify the purity of vernacular architecture. Rather the opposite, they attempted to update and personalize them according to their peculiar lifestyles: without complexes and with a certain provocation.

In the ateliers of both houses, for example, directly related with the best vision of the surrounding landscape, they opened panoramic windows, influenced by the large horizontal windows presented by modern architecture. Both artists embraced at first modern design and architecture, to transform later on their houses in anti functionalist homes, with deep mythological and symbolical roots¹⁰.

Both were indeed successful at building their own imaginary, Manrique referring to geological and volcanic nature¹¹. Dalí from his most delusional surrealist and indecent dreams. The artistic view of the immediate surroundings, given their vital implication, was expressed in their pictorial works. In many of them, the aesthetic discovery of geography, geology and vernacular culture is revealed¹². Therefore, when visiting these houses we do not contemplate so much their works of art, but their minor DIY work, although they still reveal the aesthetic ideas of the artists. Both of them liked to collect “as found objects” and place them in their homes as “ready-made”. Subsequently, we could compare such homes with curio shops where a collection of unusual objects are displayed, destined to inspire the artist.

These two houses offer the visitors, as I have described until now, many lessons on a different dwelling style. Other ways of living that can be apprehended and applied to a greater or lesser extent to our contemporary domestic surroundings. Among the lessons, for example, I would point out the ability to inhabit existing architectures transforming them uninhibitedly in more personal and thoughtful surroundings. As well as, if occasion arises, allowing the house to extend out on the exterior spaces, authentic outdoor rooms where one can celebrate life in good company.

Although Dalí and Manrique both tried to withdraw in ascetic shelters, these are now houses open to visitors and have, consequently subverted their own sense: maintaining the privacy of their inhabitants. However, both had already been exposed, perhaps not to the general public but to the

¹⁰ Both Dalí, with his first occupation of fishermen barracks, and Manrique, acquired modern furniture, as a sign of their early adhesion to the prevailing artistic movements. Nevertheless, both later incorporated local traditional objects and furniture. See Gómez Aguilera, F. (2006) and Riley, T. (2002).

¹¹ Manrique, in the inaugural speech of his foundation, 1992, said “I knew at the time that the secret for the vital reason and the sense of truth was found in nature, that is why I came to this volcanic island”. Quote from Marchán Fiz, S. (1996): 17.

¹² See the the catalogue raisonné of Dalí’s work in his official website http://www.salvador-dali.org/cataleg_raonat/index.html (looked up on September 5, 2011).

social realm of the artists: there they hosted their friends, acquaintances, and famous personalities that came by to visit them. That was the reason behind the creation of generous and pleasurable outdoor spaces surrounding landscaped patios with pools. (Figures 11 and 12) House museums have now become another sort of amusement parks, displaying with impunity the unusual domesticity as touristic attraction.



House museums of famous characters are part of the event-places circuit that have interested tourist agencies: dream makers. They are another recreational and commercial facility offered to tourists. House museums that spreading an outstanding way of living, much more uninhibited in the samples presented. In short, this two house museums are paradigmatic representation of a nonconformist attitude in front of conventional lifestyles, building instead, a personal utopian fantasy. Dalí's and Manrique's homes reflect thus their own worlds, free of all previous established spatial and temporal conventions. When visited they become models for a different way of inhabiting. The "touristification" of unusual domestic architecture allows us to imagine a different housing type and, therefore, a different way of life.

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Figures description

1. The boat with the cypress tree in present day. Ricardo Devesa. 2009.

2. Apparition of my cousin Carolinetta on the beach at Rosas (fluid premonition). Salvador Dalí. 1933.
3. Floor plan of Dalí's house in Portlligat. Oriol Clos.
4. View of the house from the shore. Ca. 1951
5. Photo montage of the backyard with the two coffee cup flower pot olive trees. Ricardo Devesa. 2009.
6. Access patio to the César Manrique's house-museum with the cup of the palm tree and the avocado rising from their bubbles. Ricardo Devesa. 2011.
7. César Manrique before the painting "Wind". Fundación César Manrique.
8. Red bubble with the dried-up fig tree. César Manrique Foundation.
9. Living dining room with spiral staircase and the circular hole connecting with the black bubble. César Manrique Foundation.
10. Underground level with the five bubbles and the extension for the atelier and ground floor. César Manrique Foundation.
11. César Manrique in the 'jameo' used as leisure area. César Manrique Foundation. T.N. A 'jameo' is a large and deep cave product of the collapse of the ceiling of a volcanic chimney.
12. Pool in Dalí's museum house, Portlligat. Ca. 1970.