



THE ARTISTIC HERITAGE

AS A RESULT OF THE EXCHANGES AND CONTACTS THAT HAVE TAKEN PLACE OVER THE YEARS BETWEEN THE LOCAL POPULATION AND FOREIGN INFLUENCES, ANDORRAN ART IS FUNCTIONAL –SERVING A SMALL POPULATION– BUT CLOSELY LINKED TO WESTERN EUROPEAN ARTISTIC TRENDS.

MARTA PLANAS I DE LA MAZA ART HISTORIAN

The geographical location of the territory of Andorra and the exchange of socio-cultural relations are key factors in understanding her historico-artistic development. Andorra has been a stopping-off point and a meeting-point for exchanges since prehistoric times. The result of these contacts between the local population and foreign influences is a functional art, serving reduced nuclei of population, but closely linked to the artistic trends developing over the years in the framework of Western Europe. Whenever people speak of the artistic manifestations which over the ages have gradually shaped our “material culture”, they always put a special emphasis on the period between the ninth and thirteenth centuries. This historico-artistic period represents a moment of intense historical activity in the terri-



SANT MIQUEL D'ENGOLASTERS

tory of Andorra, first because of subordination to the bishopric and the County of Urgell (ninth to tenth centuries) and then because of the struggle for sovereignty (eleventh to thirteenth centuries). The art of this period reflects this nobility, devoted entirely to artistic creation, so that it now makes up the greater part of our heritage.

During this artistic period, we can see a development from the moment when it is conceived as a style until it acquires the well-determined forms of true Romanesque. This style, as in the neighbouring areas, was to receive the different waves of stylistic influences that bathed western Europe. We can therefore speak of Italian influences in the circular belltowers (Santa Coloma, Sant Vicenç d'Enclar), whose origins have to be sought in certain *campanili*, and of an exterior arrangement of the wall

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CHURCH OF SANTA COLOMA (XII C.)

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using Lombardic naves and narrow arches, typical of the twelfth century. Also present are Byzantine reminiscences in the murals (Sant Esteve d'Andorra la Vella) and in the painting on wood (Sant Romà de Vila).

Small churches with sober ornamentation, based on the aesthetic precepts of conceptual, abstract and totally spiritual art, are representative of this period of artistic maturity.

In the interior we find pictures in praise of the divinity, with a rich chromatic range –the creation of anonymous masters, disciples of the great Catalan medieval painters–, as well as magnificent images, furniture and liturgical objects.

The functionalism and simplicity of these constructions are features that lasted for centuries and survived the end of the medieval period.



VIRGIN OF SANTA COLOMA (XII-XIII C.)

Civil architecture is not lacking –with several bridges on the main roads– and neither is military architecture –with two prime examples, the ruins of the Castell de Sant Vicenç d'Enclar and the defence tower of Sant Romà de les Bons.

Following the peace established by the *Paratges* (1278-1288), a generalized stagnation impregnated the Andorran mentality; new trends could not flourish freely because technique and style remained archaic. Art became closed and unoriginal, and exalted and repeated medieval examples. We can therefore speak of a gothic tradition in the fifteenth century as regards the altarpieces, or a highly ruralized and secondary baroque. In architecture, the medieval tradition was even stricter, both as regards new buildings (Casa de la Vall, 1580; Sant Pere del Tarter, first half of

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SANT ROMÀ (LES BONS)

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the sixteenth century) and the many additions to several originally Romanesque buildings (Sant Martí de la Cortinada, Santa Eulàlia d'Encamp and others).

However, there is no lack of outstanding exceptions, such as the altarpiece of Sant Joan de Caselles, from the mid-sixteenth century, which has a direct connection with the Catalan Renaissance and shows marked Germanic and Italian influences.

It was not until the twentieth century that transformations in Andorran society brought about a change of mentality that allowed a gradual modernization of culture, which reached a level similar to that of other countries.

This innovatory spirit is reflected in works like the "Casa dels Russos" (1916), by the Gaudí-influenced architect César Martinell, where the use of



SANTA COLOMA

local materials transforms the general characteristics of Catalan Modernism visually, though not conceptually, or the "Casa la Cruz", from the thirties, the work of the Catalan architect and remarkable art historian Josep Puig i Cadafalch.

From the thirties on, there is a noticeable change in traditional architecture. During this period, the great hotels and spas were built (Hotel Valira and Carlemany, at Escaldes; Hotel Rosaleda, at Encamp), with their blend of French and Catalan influences typical of Pyrenean border areas, though always preserving the constant integration in the natural surroundings, thanks to the local stone that has continued to be used in the construction of this new architecture.

By the seventies Andorra had become a country with one of the highest per ca-



SANTA EULÀLIA D'ENCAMP

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pita incomes in Europe, allowing many of the *comitents* of Andorra to commission works from leading figures of the world of architecture. This is the case of the new Santuari de la Mare de Déu de Meritxell (1976), the work of the Catalan Ricard Bofill, inspired in the burned-out ruins of the old sanctuary –which stood on the same site–, and combining characteristic elements of Andorra’s architectural tradition and the natural environment: schist stone, Romanesque arches, the white of the snow and the green –which appears with time through the alteration of the copper.

At the end of the eighties, the Catalan group of architects Martorell-Bohigas-Mackay were given the job of carrying out the enlargement of the church of Santa Eulàlia d'Encamp, where a remarkable contrast was achieved be-



SANTA EULÀLIA D'ENCAMP

tween medieval architectural forms and the latest avant-gardes.

This decade saw the birth of the first “curtain-wall” combined with an avant-garde square which was a break with previous models, completely abandoning stone as a decorative element of the façade. This building houses the Comú d'Encamp.

In recent decades, various public buildings and buildings belonging to the administration (the Serradells swimming-pool, the government administrative building, the Palau de Gel at Canillo, etc.), private or parapublic buildings (Centre Júlia, Prada Casadet building, respectively) have contributed to the architectural transformation within the general context favouring the proliferation of private constructions with a minimum of urban planning. ■