

# METROPOLIS. AN URBAN PERSPECTIVE OF GALICIAN ART

On the occasion of the 90th anniversary of the first showing of the film, *Metropolis*, by Fritz Lang, in the former Odeón cinema, we take a look back at what was certainly a turning point in Vigo's history, a moment in which the past, present and future came together in this perfect and elegant harmony, known as *art deco*. A style which somehow managed to seamlessly combine classic and ultramodern design.

Just as *art nouveau* was going out of style, the *Art deco* style (the abbreviation of *arts décoratifs*) was beginning to emerge, with one coinciding with the autumn and the other with the spring of 1910. However, it wasn't until the "roaring twenties" that this artistic movement really reached its peak, and despite its French name, this art movement managed to conquer the whole world, and in fact, it was on the other side of the Atlantic, in

the wealthy North American society that this style really managed to reach great heights. A symbol of great evocative power, *art deco*, to this day, is still synonymous with luxury and splendour. This art movement managed to resist the dramatic stock market crash of 1929, the devastating Great Depression which followed, and the long and bloody Second World War, although the postmodernism of the last quarter of the twentieth century essentially stripped it of its elegant and sophisticated languor. This decorative style has been revamped on various occasions, none quite as hyperbolic as the *neo-deco* movement of the eighties. And this trend has continued to the present, where once again we are witnesses to the revival of a style which will never go out of fashion given that it draws inspiration from classic art forms.

# GALICIAN HISTORICAL PHOTOGRAPHY. THE COUNTRY AS THE SETTING

During the twenties and thirties, Galicia and its people were the subject of the greatest and most emblematic work by some of the main Galician and foreign historical photographers.

These pieces captured the essence of urban and rural Galicia, with their respective economic and social activities. Historical and artistic documents in equal measure, including surviving contemporary copies and prints taken directly from the primitive photo laboratory, all with the artists' approval.

The majority of the pieces are reduced-size, high-quality artistic photographs which could be sent as postcards or kept as collectors' items. There are also other larger-scale pieces, considered as authentic works of art, many of which were able to compete with traditional oil-paintings and water-colours for a place in some of the more well-off households.

These scenes offer a romantic vision of life in our country during the interwar period, although not always without a veiled social critique".

# THE GALICIAN HISTORICAL PHOTOGRAPHERS (I)

**Jaime de Sousa Guedes Pacheco** (Portugal, 1878 – Vigo, 1954) had already learned the trade with his brother José Pacheco, the owner of a studio in Ourense, before he decided to lay down his roots in our city. In 1907 he went into business with Felipe Prósperi's widow, the owner of a photo gallery located in calle del Príncipe, which became known as Pacheco y Vda de Próspero (Pacheco and Prósperi's widow). It kept this name until 1915 when Jaime Pacheco became the sole owner. The gallery's workload gradually increased, both in terms of studio photography and outdoor work, taking on photography assignments for the *Faro de Vigo*, *El Pueblo Gallego*, *ABC*, *Blanco y Negro*, *Cifra* and *Marca*, among other publications, in addition to collaborating with *Vida Gallega* and P.P.K.O. publishers. Jaime Pacheco was in charge of the studio work, considered to be more prestigious than outdoor reporting, and in fact it was his nephew, Horacio, who took on this particular task during the twenties and thirties, taking photographs of the city's streets, with its rationalist buildings and deco and managing to capture some of the most relevant political episodes during the Republic and the Civil War.

This collection from the Archivo Pacheco (Pacheco Archive), which has been the property of the Vigo City Council since 1999, is enormous, and its aesthetic and historical value is unquestionable given that it represents a century of the city's history.

# THE GALICIAN HISTORICAL PHOTOGRAPHERS (II)

**Luis Casado Fernández, Ksado** (Ávila, 1888 – Santiago de Compostela, 1972) went to live in Ourense when he was six years old, and at just ten years old he started working as an apprentice in José Pacheco's studio. In 1915 he opened his own studio in calle del Vilar de Santiago and in 1922, when his business in Santiago de Compostela was well-established, he decided to widen his scope of activity, moving to Vigo, a city with much greater economic possibilities, leaving his sister in charge of his first business.

Since the early years he worked for the press, and in 1911 the *Nuevo Mundo* had already given him his press card. Over the course of his long professional career he collaborated with numerous newspapers and magazines including the *Faro de Vigo*, *El Pueblo Gallego*, *Nuevo Mundo*, *ABC*, *La Esfera*, *Mundo Gráfico*, *La Vanguardia*, *Céltiga*, *Galicia* and *Vida Gallega*, as well as Argentinian publications such as *La Nación*, *La Prensa* y *Diario de la Marina*.

During Primo de Rivera's dictatorship (1923-1930), Ksado published the book *Estampas compostelanas* (Pictures of Santiago de Compostela), which included the monuments

of the capital and he went on to publish a second version in 1948. However it was his picture card album, *Estampas de Galicia* (Picture cards of Galicia) (1936) that was his real masterpiece. Thanks to Ksado's belief in Galician autonomy, he became part of a remarkable movement which aimed to define the identifying traits of a country, and he was destined to become the great "photographer of the race".

At a time in which photography exhibitions were few and far between, he exhibited his work in Vigo, Betanzos, Ponferrada, in the Palacio de Cristal (Crystal Palace) and Centro Gallego (Galician Centre) of Madrid, and in Buenos Aires. Ksado was one of the most important Galician historical photographers, managing to circulate his work throughout the country, and achieving much greater recognition than any of the other photographers and he was considered to be a true artist.

In 2011, the Department of Culture of the Vigo City Council also acquired the Archivo Ksado, (Ksado Archive), which was comprised of some of the most significant and iconic pieces which were produced in the twenties and thirties.

# THE GALICIAN HISTORICAL PHOTOGRAPHERS (III)

Alongside Pacheco and Ksado, there were other great figures who also used Galicia as the main stage for their work. The **Sarabia brothers** - José (Trives, 1870–1907), Constantino (Trives, 1875–1966) y Enrique (Trives, 1881–1959) were also based in Vigo and they collaborated with the *Vida Gallega* magazine between 1910 and 1938.

Pontevedra was home to the excellent portrait photographer, **Joaquín Pintos** (Vigo, 1881 – Pontevedra, 1967), who started off as the apprentice of the great Francisco Zagal. Joaquín's work covered half a century of the city of Lerez's economic, social, culture and political history.

**Ramón Caamaño** (Muxía, 1908 – 2007) produced his highly appreciated photo-

graphic work in the villages and towns of Costa da Morte.

**Pedro Ferrer** (La Coruña, 1870–1939) was the most important photographer in the city of La Coruña during the first third of the twentieth century, and the ethnographic value of his work which encompassed all of Galicia and captured its inhabitants immersed in their daily lives certainly stood out. **Ángel Blanco** (La Coruña, 1891–1989) was another of the great photographers to come out of La Coruña, and he was the graphics editor of the *Prensa Española*, *La Vanguardia*, *Estampa*, *Semana Gráfica*, *Vida Gallega*, *Luna y Sol* and *El Orzán*.

# THE FOREIGN PHOTOGRAPHERS

The **Arxiu Mas** institution in Barcelona, was founded in 1900 by Adolf Mas Ginestà (Solsona, 1860 – Barcelona, 1936), with the aim of trying to create an archive of images of Catalonia. It was commissioned to carry out numerous assignments, and it was Adolf's son, Pelau Mas (Barcelona, 1891–1954), who embarked on photographic tours of the whole Iberian Peninsula. He came to Galicia in 1919, returning for short periods in 1922, 1927, 1928 and 1931.

In 1924, the North American ethnographer and photographer **Ruth Matilda Anderson** (Nebraska, 1893 – New York 1983) arrived in Vigo, having been sent here by the Hispanic Society of America. The photographic report covering her trip was a valuable contribution to the museum's photographic archives and during her trip she also collected the necessary documentation for a book which she would release in New York, fifteen years later, *Gallegan Provinces of Spain: Pontevedra and*

*La Coruña*. Until then, the activities of the Galician countryside and sea had not been documented through photography in such an exhaustive manner, and her work gave a real insight into life in these areas which were quite complicated to access.

In 1928, and coinciding with Ksado's informative experiences with the editorial world, as well as the attempts by the Seminary of Galician Studies to create a photographic archive, **Otto Wunderlich** (Stuttgart, 1886 – Madrid, 1975) came to work in our community for the Ministry of Tourism.

Following the Civil War, Diego de Quiroga y Losada (Madrid, 1880 – San Sebastián, 1976), the **Marquess of Santa María del Villar**, toured our land on various occasions, and thanks to his true vocation for dissemination, his naturalist and immediate art is a fine example of pre-touristic Spanish photography and it is of great ethnographic and documentary interest.