

# VIGO, A CITY THAT IN THE EARLY 20TH CENTURY, ALSO DREAMT ABOUT BEING A METROPOLIS

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.

*Metropolis* – German expressionist science-fiction film – seemed to be the mirror our city wished to see itself reflected in. As perhaps the 1930s was when Vigo was closest to becoming a real cinema metropolis. In October 1930, the famous architect Antonio Palacios received a very special commission from the City Council: To draw up an urban plan: “Plan for extension and reformation of the inner city of Vigo”, which would be delivered two years later and received definitive municipal approval in January 1934. In turn, 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. In 1925, Paris opened the historic Exposition Internationale des Arts Décoratifs et Industriels Modernes, exhibiting the best

creations of designers of the stature of Ruhlmann, Lalique or Rateau, synonymous with luxury and sophistication. However, two decades before, *Le Figaro* had published on the front page of their Saturday edition [February 20th, 1909], one of the most iconoclastic texts in the history of art: the Manifesto of Futurism. The author of these words was none other than the Italian poet and publisher Filippo Tommaso Marinetti and the Manifesto laid the foundations of one of the most controversial historical avant-garde movements. A rebelliousness that spoke of ‘demolishing’ museums and libraries, of ‘combating’ moralism and “all opportunistic and utilitarian cowardice”, to end with a praise of the hectic modern city. However, in reality, progress is not incompatible with respect for heritage, something that the city of the olive tree, unfortunately, was to learn too late. And it is precisely in a building like this, the home of MARCO de Vigo, where our discourse acquires its true meaning. Because the old Palace of Justice on Príncipe street did not succumb, as did others, to the devastating real estate speculation of the latter part of the 20th century. Converted into Contemporary Art Museum of the city, its walls are housing recent creations, in different artistic disciplines, of the contemporary Galician artists.

# ART DECO

O Despite its French name, the *art Deco* artistic trend conquered the whole world, including the other side of the Atlantic, where the wealthy North American society took the style to its greatest heights. And perhaps the “synchrony” is one of the secrets of its eternal youth, and the one that best explains its persistence throughout the decades.

Because *Art Deco* was masterly committed to the future and new technologies, to vertigo and speed, to the din of machines and the roar of engines; and all without losing sight of the past. This enabled it to take the plunge, its shine first seduced the elite and then captivated the popular classes.

Their reference points would be several, from the contemporary avant-garde movements – fauvism, constructivism, futurism, geometrical abstraction, cubism – to the remotest antiquity. Because *Art Deco* is cultured, well-educated, and travelled to Pharaonic Egypt, collector of African masks and exotic trinkets imported from the Far East, while at the same time displaying the classical robes of the Greco-Roman tradition.

*Deco* furniture, low in height, more comfortable and accessible, is obsessed with geometrical shapes and volumes, with straight lines and symmetry (or sometimes, studied asymmetry). Rateau, Ruhlmann and

Leleu were three of the most prestigious firms at the time. Architects and interior decorators will walk hand in hand, playing with two colours and soft pastel tones. Painting, eminently decorative, boasts a great female figure in this movement, the Polish artist Tamara de Lempicka. But graphic design was to be one of the fields that did the most to popularize the Deco style, with covers of important magazines such as *Vogue* or *Vanity Fair*, because haute couture, with designers such as Jean Patou and Paul Poiret, and the extraordinary jewellery of Cartier and Van Cleef & Arpels, were not affordable to the average person.

With great evocative power, *art Deco* is still today synonymous with luxury and splendour. Having been able to survive the dramatic 1929 Wall Street Crash, the subsequent devastating Great Depression and the Second World War, postmodernism in the last quarter of the 20th century displaced it from its elegant and sophisticated listlessness, experiencing different revisions, some as hyperbolic as the neo-Deco of the eighties. And thus, to current times, with the rebirth of a style that because it was inspired by the classics, will never go out of fashion.

## ART DECO

### **Art Deco “made in Galicia”**

Cervigón, a shop in Coruña that no longer exists, was specialised in luxury furniture and is one of the extremely rare examples of high-quality Galician *Deco* production. Founded in 1920 as Hijos de Emilio Cervigón Carreras, skilful cabinet making was to become one of its hallmarks, making its products highly desirable by the select clientele that comprised the new and

vigorous bourgeoisie.

Cervigón was the sophisticated and avant-garde, European and cosmopolitan, an alternative to the over-decorated Renaissance style that was fashionable at the time. Custom-made furniture, made with exotic woods from America, the Philippines, Africa or northern Europe. Exclusive and impeccable. This was the only way to gain the appreciation of such demanding clientele.

# RENOVATION OF ARCHITECTURE IN VIGO. RATIONALISM

If 1925 was a key year in decorative arts, in the field of architecture there is also a 1925 generation, referring to a first group of professionals in Madrid who, in their work, displayed a change in sensitivity, more aligned with what was happening in Europe. They were really an elite minority willing to get rid of what was a heavy burden for them: Tradition. Contacts with avant-garde movements that admired the designs of the Bauhaus and appreciated the proposals of Le Corbusier, starting the new decade with the constitution of the GATEPAC (Group of Spanish Artists and Technicians for Contemporary Architecture), a group officially committed to the Modern Movement and linked to International Modern Architecture Congresses (CIAM). However, the cultural and economic constraints of the State led to a singular

relationship with reformist trends in Spain, assimilating a formal repertory, a skin-deep symbol of modernity, more than its ideology and social commitment, which it only took up in part. Thus, we have an architecture with ornamental concessions inspired by German expressionism, art Deco and even *Streamline*, its late variant.

Through publications such as the magazine of GATEPAC, A.C., or by travelling, Galicia was to discover the avant-garde movements. A Coruña will be the main centre, and the city where the first examples of rationalism appear, although Vigo also had several figures, such as Jenaro de la Fuente Álvarez, Antonio Cominges, Romualdo de Madariaga, Pedro Alonso and, above all, Francisco Castro Represas, who introduced the skyscraper to the city.

## **RENOVATION OF ARCHITECTURE IN VIGO. RATIONALISM**

### **Progress and historical heritage.**

#### **The Palacios Plan**

The ambitious architectural proposal by Antonio Palacios, a mixture of avant-garde and tradition, would give the centre of the city a monumental appearance, reinforced by the grand avenue to be built between the harbour station and the castle of San Sebastián, location of the Municipal Palace (City Hall, Court, museums and library).

On this main street, that would be called Galicia, the city's principal buildings would be located, presided by the Regional Palace (exhibitions, assemblies, trade

fairs, planetarium, etc.), on the peak of mount Castro.

And, once again, the debate, the conflict, the struggle between misunderstood progress and preservation of the historical heritage which, even back then, triggered a strong opposition to the plan and which would culminate in March 1937, with the definitive cancellation of the project by the Administrative Court. Thus, although the first section of his Grand Avenue, joining Urzaiz with Plaza de España, was opened in 1945, the threat to the Old Town, had fortunately been just a bad dream.

# HISTORICAL GALICIAN PHOTOGRAPHY. PACHECO AND KSADO

## **Jaime de Sousa Guedes Pacheco**

(Portugal, 1878 - Vigo, 1954) learnt the trade with his brother José Pacheco, owner of a studio in Ourense, before settling in our city. In 1907 he associated with the widow of Felipe Prósperi, who managed a photographic gallery in Príncipe street, called from then on Pacheco y Vda. de Prósperi. In 1915, Jaime Pacheco became the sole owner of the establishment.

Work in the gallery increased gradually, both studio and outdoor photography, as he was a correspondent for the *Faro de Vigo*, *El Pueblo Gallego*, *ABC*, *Blanco y Negro*, *Cifra*, *Marca*, etc., also collaborating with *Vida Gallega*

and editing P.P.K.O. But Jaime will take over, basically, the studio work, socially more prestigious than outdoor reporting, which was the responsibility of his nephew Horacio in the 20s and 30s, who would photograph the streets of the city, with its rationalist and Deco buildings, as well as the most important political episodes of the Republic and the Civil War.

The collection in the Pacheco Archive, owned by the City Council of Vigo since 1991, is large and unquestionable in aesthetic as well as historical value, as it depicts one century in the history of the city.

## HISTORICAL GALICIAN PHOTOGRAPHY. PACHECO AND KSADO

### **Luis Casado Fernández, Ksado**

(Ávila, 1888 - Santiago de Compostela, 1972)

became an apprentice in José Pacheco's studio in Ourense at the age of ten. In 1915 he would open his own in Vilar street in Santiago de Compostela. Later, in 1922, he extended his activities and came to Vigo, a city where there were more economic possibilities, and his sister took charge of the first establishment

From the beginning, he also worked for the press. During his long professional life, he collaborated with numerous newspapers and magazines such as *Faro de Vigo*, *El Pueblo Gallego*, *Nuevo Mundo*, *ABC*, *La Esfera*, *Mundo Gráfico*, *La Vanguardia*, *Céltiga*, *Galicia* and *Vida Gallega*, and with Argentinean publications such as *La Nación*, *La Prensa* and *Diario de la Marina*.

During the Primo de Rivera dictatorship (1923-1930), he published the book *Estampas Compostelanas* (which had a second edition in 1948), dedicated to the monuments in the

city. However, the photo album *Estampas de Galicia* (1936) was his fundamental work. Ksado's relation to Galician identity and political autonomy led him to take an active part in a movement that was trying to define the identity of a country in which he was going to be the great "photographer of the race".

At a time when photographic exhibitions were rare, his work was exhibited in Vigo, Betanzos, Ponferrada, in the Palacio de Cristal and the Centro Gallego in Madrid as well as in Buenos Aires. Ksado was one of the most important historical Galician photographers, and the best-known in the country, achieving an appreciation of photography and an acknowledgment much greater than other photographers, as even in his time he was considered a real artist.

In 2011, the Department of Culture of the City Council of Vigo purchased the Ksado Archive, with significant and iconic photos from the 20s and 30s.