

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.

THE ERA OF THE GREAT EXHIBITIONS

A series of changes which would lead to considerable transformations in industrial production began in Great Britain around the year 1780. These changes were associated with the automation of work processes, and a transformation into an urban and industrial society. This Industrial Revolution spread to other countries, however, the speed with which the processes were implemented, depended on a wide range of factors; the existence of resources, availability of capital, demographic growth, demand for products and the specific political situation of the country at the time.

It is therefore hardly surprising to learn that the first Universal Exhibition was held in London in 1851. *The Great Exhibition of the Works of Industry of All Nations* marked the beginning of a series of important exhibitions. These were designed to showcase the country's industrial progress to the rest of the world: raw materials, machinery, manufactured products... The Crystal Palace, in Hyde Park, was specifically

built to house this exhibition which was officially inaugurated on the 1st of May. This building which was designed by Joseph Paxton, cost a total of two million pounds at the time, and it was built entirely from cast iron and glass. With its unparalleled constructive display, it certainly impressed the more than six million people who visited the exhibition.

Many of the pavilions which were built especially for this event were short-lived and were torn down straight after the exhibition's closing ceremony. On the 1st of May, 1878, the seventh Universal Exposition, and the third to be held in the City of Lights was inaugurated in Paris. For this event, the Trocadero Palace and the Champ de Mars were built along the shores of the River Seine and the *Statue of Liberty's* head from New York was put on display in the Champ de Mars gardens. The *Eiffel Tower* was built for the next Universal Exposition to be held in the French Capital which was inaugurated in 1889 to commemorate the 100th anniversary

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of the French Revolution. This controversial 300 metre wrought iron structure – the tallest in the world until the Chrysler Building in New York was completed in 1930- served as the entrance arch to the fair. The Gare d'Orsay railway station –now a museum-, the *Petit and Grand Palais*, and the monumental *Pont Alexandre III*, were all built for the fifth Universal Exposition which took place in Paris in 1889. After the First World War (1914 -1918), Paris would go on to host another significant exhibition in 1925, the *International Exhibition of Modern Decorative and Industrial Arts*. This event was fundamental in the international promotion of a new art style which was named Art Deco. In Spain, Catalonia was the pioneer of the Industrial Revolution, and it was only right that Barcelona was the first city in Spain to host a Universal Exposition in 1888, going on to host the *International Exposition of Barcelona* in 1929. One of the buildings specifically built for the latter was the *German Pavilion*, considered to this day as a real masterpiece.

This structure was demolished following the closing ceremony, although it was subsequently re-built in its original location, following the blueprints of its architect, Mies van der Rohe. Seville played host to the *Ibero-American Exhibition*, which was inaugurated in the hope of uniting Spain, Portugal, Latin America, the United States of America and Brazil. The *Plaza de España* was the main architectural ensemble to be specifically built for this exposition. A considerable number of exhibitions of this type were held throughout the 19th and 20th centuries, on an international, national, regional and provincial level.

All of these events demonstrated this same spirit of transformation which was spurred on by scientific developments, and which was visible both in material and ideological developments. These exhibitions always showcased the very latest developments. The modest Galician exhibitions held in Santiago de Compostela in 1858 and 1909 were a magnificent example of this trend.

INDUSTRIAL EXHIBITION OF GALICIA AND THE SEA FAIR

In the post-war period, Vigo, the most thriving of all of the Galician cities, played host to two trade fairs. In August 1944, the *Industrial Exhibition of Galicia* was inaugurated in the Eijo Garay gardens, in Areal. The success of this event led to the town being established as the Free Trade Zone for the North of Spain in 1947, pipping other important ports, including Bilbao, Santander and Gijon, to the post. Fernando Molíns y Luciano Turc, the architect and technician for the garden project, were jointly responsible for managing these works. Two large panels designed by Juan Antonio Morales flanked the fair's triple triumphal entrance arch. On the left side, *the Earth* was symbolised by a masculine character, holding a wrought iron anvil, making reference to the human effort required in order to yield results, the fruits of the earth, an overflowing cornucopia. And *the Sea* to the right, represented by a female figure holding a globe and covered with a cloak which was decorated with fish and snails, the fruits of the sea. Both of these monumental personifications depicted

architectural constitution and expressionless faces. This rhetorical and expressive art, and classicist colossalism was very much to the taste of the new Francoist Regime. The organisers collaborated with Galician artists, such as the sculptor, Juan Oliveira, and the painters, Laxeiro and Urbano Lugrís in the decoration of the rest of the space. Building on the momentum of this exhibition, and based on the economic power of fishing in this olive city, the *Sea Fair* took place in Berbés the following year. The fact that this fair took place at the same time as another conference, meant that this event was promoted nationwide, and in fact, the idea of keeping it on a permanent basis was even contemplated. The idea was that an Atlantic fair would be created in Vigo, to complement the Mediterranean fair located in Barcelona. Unfortunately, the desired continuity of both the exhibition and the fair did not come to fruition. The all-encompassing powers of the Francoist institutions ended up absorbing any delusions of greatness which may have existed.

THE ARCHITECTURE OF THE AUTARCHY PASCUAL BRAVO SANFELIÚ

The new post-war political, economic and cultural reality granted a certain unitarian nature to architecture, which used the revitalization of historicist languages and monumental academicism as a starting point, and which resulted in the paralysation of the feeble modernisation process which commenced in the previous period. Although this process began in the 1940s, it wasn't until the following decade that the gradual recovery of this risky commitment to modernity was able to be appreciated. Identified with republican values, the former rationalism would succumb to the same fate as the rest of its symbols. And at the same time as rationalism was being rejected as a propaganda vehicle, a group of architects, connected to the Regime were trying, in vain, to define an "official" tentative architecture which would counter the ideological void of the new State.

Their sycophant attempt resulted in a pseudo-historicism of imperialistic airs, in which they drew inspiration from the Herrerian-style architecture and the neo-classicism of Juan de Villanueva. In this way,

and given the lack of a national style, it was the particular interests of the conservative bourgeoisie which were to be imposed. These were regionalist aesthetics which had already been associated with Primo de Rivera's dictatorship, and which had been showcased in an unrivalled manner in the International Exposition of Barcelona and the Ibero-American Exhibition of Seville which both took place in 1929.

Vigo's post-war architecture would also fit into this general Spanish concept. And although both the neo-baroque regionalism and academist eclecticism ended up being revitalised, and both styles revelled in their wide-scale acceptance among the local elite, it is also true that the modernistic elements did not disappear completely, and this could be seen in the layout of floors and the general distribution of buildings. The situation remained as such until the end of the 1950s when it was finally possible to break away from this artistic and cultural isolation, and resume the pre-war path, in contact with international production.

**THE ARCHITECTURE
OF THE AUTARCHY
PASCUAL BRAVO
SANFELIÚ**

Pascual Bravo Sanfeliú (Zaragoza, 1893 – Madrid, 1984, who graduated in 1918 with a degree in Architecture from the Higher School of Architecture of Madrid, where he went on to be a professor and eventually the director, was given the task of designing the pavilions of Spain for the Exhibition of Decorative Arts of Paris, and the Aragón pavilion for the Ibero-American Exhibition of Seville [1929]). Out of all of his work in Madrid, his collaboration in the construction of the University City and its subsequent restoration following the Civil War is certainly worthy of a mention.

His first project in Vigo was the Building for José Mouriño Vilas in calle Urzaiz nº 5 which was drafted and signed in Madrid, in May, 1946. This unique building had a spacious flat arch porch built on quadrangular svelte pillars, and the ground and first floors, both of which served a commercial function,

were set back in this way. Likewise, this great vertical sky-scraper culminated in a series of staggered volumes with great plasticity, converting this street into an authentic metropolitan setting. In December of the following year, the architect signed another project which was to be developed just metres away from the aforementioned project. The former Hotel Lisboa, in calle Urzaiz at the corner with Gran Vía, was originally designed as a residential building, however the decision was made that they should make the most out of its privileged location, and overcome the monumentality based on a refined eclecticism. The lateral facades were brought together in a rounded bevel where the main entrance was located, and the vertical axis culminated in a towered body with an octagonal cupola, reminiscent of the art deco style.

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 photographic 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.