

GLASS IN LAS MATAS

**About the house in Las Matas, Madrid, of Ignacio Vicens and
José Antonio Ramos**

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It seems incredible that exactly thirteen years have past since that scene in Rotterdam and that we are here, now, reenacting. Like the theater performance that it involves, we have once again gathered together the same characters.

On that 5 of September in 1980, we had arranged to meet in that disturbing Dutch city for the world premiere of Satyagraha in the dilapidated Stadsschouwburg Theater. Philip Glass, John Adams, Steve Reich, Douglas Perry, Ignacio Vicens, and I, were drinking coffee, which was excellent, by the way, at two tables pushed together in the mythic Odeon. We talked endlessly. I will never erase that unforgettable reunion from my memory. We were so content that warm September, that we would not have moved from there for the whole afternoon.

John Adams, gesturing with his thick glasses at hand, recounted the finishing touches he had made to his splendid Harmonium that would later premiere with so much success in 1981. He also hummed a few passages as a first preview.

Steve Reich, with childlike enthusiasm, described how his Tehillim was then being played by all the American radio stations, and had begun to sell a considerable number of copies. When I said that in Spain, Radio 2 had transmitted it a couple of times he could not believe it. It was then that I got him to promise to compose the music for a video that we've been making ever since, about a few of my projects, with Shari Belafonte strolling through them.

Douglas Perry was logically the one who least spoke. With a cup of lemon with honey, as was his custom before a premiere, to warm up his powerful voice. His shaved head glowed brilliantly like a billiard ball, and gave him an Indian air, appropriate to the figure he was to portray a few hours later.

Unusually quiet, I listened. Philip Glass was tranquil, as if the premiere were not his own, and had gotten involved in a quasi-philosophical debate with Ignacio Vicens. The latter, spectacularly brilliant in his erudite discourse, peppered it with delightful anecdotes about the life of Erasmus there in his city, with the ease afforded by profound culture.

And that debate between Philip Glass and Ignacio Vicens, is that which this Madrid morning, with me as the only witness, they have both vehemently resumed in café Gijón. With a radiant morning sun, before a splendid breakfast, presided over by a succulent platter of churros.

From Gijón, without descending from the cloud of madness eulogized by Erasmus, we dashed off in a ramshackle red Panda towards Las Matas. A college classmate of Philip Glass had so enthusiastically spoken of the house in Las Matas, that we could do no less than go and see it.

And there something incredible happened: when we passed through the robust gates of rusted steel that open onto the property, the sound of that well-known music silenced us. The unmistakable voice of the tenor Douglas Perry, as if he was there live, intoned the insistent lamentations of Gandhi with which begins the moving Satyagraha. And it did not stop resounding, accompanied by the instruments of the New York City Opera Orchestra, until the end of our amazing tour.

With Glass leading the procession, we began a sort of architectural promenade during which we seemed to float upon music created for that space.

The changing horizontal planes over which we glided connected spaces harmonized by those obsessive tones.

The extending vertical planes, highlighted by their strongly textured characteristic acrid ochre color, precisely resolved the operations planned by the architects.

The LIGHT, at times mysterious, at other times blatant, accentuated the constant and rhythmic compressions and expansions.

We walked as if in a dream in which Barragán and Silvestrin, Oíza and Carvajal successively appeared, and in the background, always present, Frank Lloyd Wright.

We ended up, I still do not know how, sitting on the ample platform of the indigo pool, in front of the long, long house reflected in the water. I thought then that it was an architecture in season.

Architecture, like fruit, needs its time to ripen. And it is as logical as it is unusual that an architect matures well, becomes seasoned, with the passage of time.

Like Architecture itself, which is the material realization of an original idea, the creative process of an architect is, or should be, a process in crescendo. And in this trajectory of the artist-creator, there are crucial moments, that for an architect, a constructor of ideas, are key projects.

In the production of these last years by Ignacio Vicens and José Antonio Ramos, this house in Las Matas, their latest built work, is a key project. Their search for personal expression in former projects has become, here and now, a realization. The earlier promised force, compactness, and polish are read here combined with clear ease

I have just received a postcard from Philip Glass from Paris. Along with him it is signed by John Adams and Antonio García-Abril, a young architect and son of the stupendous Spanish composer, as they meet together in Les Deux Magots, the "crème de la crème" café of Saint-Germain-des-Près. (Odeon-Gijon-Deux Magots). He writes that he will not forget his visit to Ignacio Vicens and José Antonio Ramos' house in Las Matas. And he asks me to convince them to do his new house in Palm Beach. I know that it's not necessary. I too would like to have such a client.