

## **THE WELL-TEMPERED BOX**

**About the Museo de Arte Contemporáneo de Alicante, the MACA by  
Juan Carlos Sancho Osinaga and Sol Madridejos**

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This work demonstrates once again how contemporary architecture, when it is of the highest order, is able to agree with the architecture of the historic city and complete it. Because this new piece, not only dialogues perfectly with the baroque façade of the adjacent church, but even enhances it. This is what architecture has always done throughout history. More by the hand of Mnemosine than of Mimesis, it has been building the city. The ideal city.

The building is reached from the lower part of the city, in the square it presides over. As you climb the steps you first see the baroque facade of the Basilica of Santa Maria, and as you continue up the steps, around the corner, you see the large stone wall of the new Museum and the facade of the Casa de la Asegurada, the complete facade of the Museum of Contemporary Art of Alicante, the MACA, the work of architects Juan Carlos Sancho and Sol Madrdejos. A beauty.

If we analyze this new facade, we see that it is a smooth stone wall of Roman travertine marble, part of a strong box that contains the space of the Museum. "Boxes, little boxes, drawers" is how I titled a writing defending the most logical Architecture from the hand of Le Corbusier and his idea of the boîte à miracles. Well, this is a true boîte à miracles. For its perfect adaptation to the city and for the prodigies of light that take place inside it. The power of this stone box is even more evident in the rounded corner. A very strong box that, as a good safe, keeps a treasure inside.

The main entrance is through the door of the Casa de la Asegurada which, once restored and its interior has been conveniently manipulated, forms part of the Museum complex. To us it would have seemed more appropriate to have made a completely new performance, including this facade that has no more value than the environmental. But, as always, the curators of who knows what appeared to oppose it.

Above the large travertine panel opens a large window that, on the one hand, shows the public scale of the new building through its large size and its quartering, and on the other hand, in its design shows features of clear modernity. In addition, there are details of great wisdom such as increasing the scale of the stone by the introduction of vertical profiles of stainless steel each several pieces of stone. Not only does this make the stone appear much larger in size, but it also produces interesting vibrations of light and shadow that act effectively on this beautiful facade.

## INTERIOR

Inside, we find a syncopated space, the result of the sum of several very beautiful diverse spaces. It seems as if the architects had worked, as Bach does with his music, with the contrapuntal technique. They have linked several melodies, several spaces that are heard simultaneously. This is not a building of surprises. It is a global, total space, based

on diverse spaces that are read successively as one goes through them without solution of continuity. Just as Bach, using counterpoint, learned from Buxtehude, makes several melodies interact simultaneously, Sancho and Madrideojos do the same with their spaces, making us read them as just one space. That is for me the crux of the spatial issue in this beautiful building. It is, to paraphrase Bach's first book, "the well-tempered harpsichord", a well-tempered box. And so, I would dare to qualify this space as "Bachian".

The space of the lobby that runs vertically through the building in all its height, from the start of the staircase, has a very special light that comes from the large window that we have already pointed out qualifies the exterior. It is traced in a very well balanced asymmetrical cuts and uses a special translucent glass that gives a beautiful light and at the same time lets you see foreshortened and veiled the baroque facade of Santa Maria. A success.

The main operation is accompanied by a lot of details of great attention to detail. Walls covered with Roman travertine are interspersed with infinitely white cloths. Impossible trihedrons that touch at one point and produce spatial effects of great strength. Floors of Moroccan travertine that, shiny and without cracks, dialogues very well with the described walls. Exquisite metal and glass railings. Chandeliers hidden in incredible linear fissures. Bathrooms with orange and green and yellow glass walls.

But above all the details, I cannot stress enough that it is the main operations that give this building its spatial grandeur and beauty.

The three large wells of light, with a northern light as required by museum canons, brought through moirée glass with which the high boxes are built, flood everything with a beautiful diffused light. As if it were a luminous cloud.

The interior of the annex building, the Casa de la Asegurada, has also been restored with the same criteria of delicacy with which the new piece has been erected. Although everything is perfect there too, one misses the fact that the "zeal of the patrimonialists" would have been less effective, and a complete new large piece could have been made.

## FINALE

In short, I think the performance is exemplary and magnificent. Exemplary because of the capacity of the new building to "build a city", the capacity of a first-rate contemporary architecture to make the city historical without resorting to mimesis. And magnificent because the building and its interior spaces, filled with a quasi-divine light, are absolutely beautiful.

N.B.

In a treatise on music, counterpoint and harmony are discussed in these terms:

Contrapuntal music writing and harmonic music writing have a different emphasis. The former is essentially horizontal, while the latter is primarily vertical. Counterpoint differs from harmony in its greater emphasis on the linear or horizontal development of the music that unfolds in the various melodies, while harmony is primarily concerned with intervals, the vertical relationships between musical notes. However, counterpoint and harmony are functionally inseparable since both, as elements of the same musical system, complement each other. Melodic voices have a horizontal dimension, but when sounding simultaneously, they also have a vertical harmonic dimension: both dimensions are conveniently organized according to consonance.

This, which is an analytical explanation of this type of music, could be, point by point, the explanation of the spaces that architects Juan Carlos Sancho and Sol Madridejos have created in their beautiful new building in Alicante.