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Art and memory. Artistic contemporaneity at the Exile Memorial Museum (MUME).

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Review

2020

Art and memory. Artistic contemporaneity at the Exile Memorial Museum (MUME)

Since its opening to the public in 2008, the MUME has been giving importance to artistic creation throughout its programmatic proposal. Moreover, in the permanent exhibition which leads the thematic axis of the museum, contemporary creation already has a very significant role. The materials used, the museographic devices distribution, the interchange between visual and artistic resources along with the historical explanation, place the MUME on the same line as other international memorial institutions. Therefore, from the very beginning, the presence of art among historical narrative was considered unavoidable.

It couldn't be otherwise as it is an institution with a strong hybrid character. On the one hand, the museum aims to offer a historical account about the Republican exile that caused the Spanish Civil War based on the information provided by academic historiography. On the other hand, this institution is constituted as a vessel to preserve the living memory of those events, which remain vivid for all the protagonists and their descendants. Consequently, rigorous data, emotion, testimonial / biographical experience and also empathy, become elements on which the museum's discourse is based upon.

As already mentioned, the museum's discourse is characterized by its hybrid-like relation between history and memory. A fertile ground for artistic exploration, which, since the 80s has almost become a classic tradition in contemporary art. Apparently, it may seem like a contradiction but it is obvious that works by artist such as Esther Shalev-Gerz, Jochen Gerz, Mirosław Balka, Horst Hoheisel, Doris Salcedo, Dani Karavan,

Francesc Abad and Francesc Torres, to name a few, have established new lines of approach to memorialistic/historical facts, which go beyond the academia and monumentalism, and as a direct consequence, place this subject in the public eye. They have provided historical knowledge and aesthetic experience, psychological approach and critical vision to deal with what is often considered a traumatic past that had not just happened. In a similar way, some architects as Peter Eisenman, Daniel Libeskind or Rudy Ricciotti, coined with their work the counter-monument idea by giving visibility to the oppressed, those who would have been forgotten, in a Benjaminian way of speech.

This context succinctly described and due to the nature of the MUME, has to necessarily have, an impact on the temporary programme. Furthermore, the exile is probably one of the most traumatic and massive experiences of the past century, which today, still affects many people in many parts of the world having also, an ambivalent character within itself. Strangely, distance and alienation are concepts that are inseparable; they usually have a negative context. However, they can also be associated to the needed conditions for artistic creation awakening. Exile testifying art or art created during exile are of great value and interest, as this type of art reflects the forced displacement condition. For this reason, from the very beginning, the temporary activities at MUME have tried to capture this enormous potential.

Nevertheless, it was necessary to take a step further beyond the aim of introducing reflection on current visual art when interpreting and evaluating the legacies of the past. In this sense, in 2010 a small section was created within the temporary programme with the intention of embodying this goal. Under the title: “Art and memory. Contemporary artistic proposals”, a programme shaped for over a decade, has allowed dozens of small projects to contribute to a new and diverse artistic aspect –painting, installation art, photography, video installation, art documentation, Neo-Conceptualism, relational art–, in order to address perplexing matters such as individual testimony, collective memories or the ways in which societies face their uncomfortable pasts. It is crucial to talk about complex approaches that go from sociological order and documentary proposals to visions of an intimate aspect, in the search of adaptive and healing reflections facing trauma, passing through the exhibition of artistic works with a strong autobiographical content.

In short, works by artists such as Francesc Abad, Jordi Mitjà, Helena del Rivero, Pere Noguera, Pep Dardanyà, María Ruido, Toni Giró, Domènec ,

Ester Baulida, Àlex Nogué, Gonzalo Elvira, Marco Noris, Mim Juncà, among others, displayed at the “Art and memory” section are contributing to give visibility with critical and reflective elements, to be able to cope with the difficult management of inherited memory, which is still marked by controversy and unresolved trauma.