



A Short Grand Tour

Ana Torres Barchino¹(✉), Juan Serra Iluch², and Jorge Llopis Verdú³

¹ Department of Architectural Graphic Expression, Granada, Spain
atorresb@ega.upv.es

² Superior Technical School of Architecture, Madrid, Spain

³ Universitat Politècnica de València, Valencia, Spain

Abstract. Museum visits are a fascinating way to look at the world from the works of art. Apparently, it is possible for visitors to walk through the halls of a museum without hardly stopping to observe the works on display. One can sense in those absorbed gazes of the visitor-traveller an eagerness to gather in a short period everything that hangs on the walls, or perhaps, they intend to retain in the memory any artistic object without pretension or objective, nor criticism or judgment about it. To reflect on this issue of the pleasures presented by a visit to a museum, we wanted to think about the ways of visiting it, from a programmed and organized tour to the free walk through the rooms to finding and contemplating the piece that interests us the most, the lesser-known works or simply its architecture. In this paper, we describe a teaching methodology that, although not unique, allowed a group of architecture students to discover the *Museo Nacional del Prado* (MNP) from different points of view. In this short tour inside the Museum, it was possible, on the one hand, to improve the ability to observe and, on the other, to enrich skills not previously experienced in drawing.

Keywords: Architecture · Museum · Teaching · Arts · Drawing

1 Introduction

A visit to a museum is a task that arouses some interest for any curious person who needs to be a spectator, eager to learn about the history of the arts. But it is not necessary to be an expert in this field, or even to know the authors or artistic techniques, although it is always enriching to have some notion of it beforehand. Visiting and seeing works of art is an experience that, with a little cultural sensitivity, we come to understand as part and sense of a world very different from the one we are used to experiencing on a daily basis.

Accessing an incredible art gallery such as the *Museo Nacional del Prado* is an occasion that almost always causes an indescribable pleasure for any sensitive person and, in a way, with the interest of isolating themselves and separating themselves from the everyday world for a moment, to enter another. To the lovers of the arts and drawing, a museum is the perfect place to contemplate the works of great or anonymous artists and where they are often inspired and learn the ins and outs of it while sketching their own notes (Fig. 1).



Fig. 1. Rosales Gallinas, Eduardo. *El Salón del Prado y la iglesia de San Jerónimo*. c. 1871. Oil on canvas, 142 × 297, 5 cm. Hall 101. Source: Museo Nacional del Prado (MNP)

Among other things, artists strive to look and admire until they grasp the essentials (the subject, the technical process, etc.) and then create their own work. This process of observation, admiration or study is a matter of time and learning. It is to have time to see, to come face to face with a work of art and it is a task to rediscover new things, to experiment [1].

Perhaps, in the act of observing a painting or other artistic piece for the first time at the MNP, we have overlooked some kind of fragment or detail in them. They may be worth revisiting or re-reading to find other meanings. In short, seeing a collection of works again, or simply one of them from a different perspective broadens our knowledge and training.

In the words of the poet and architect Joan Margarit [2], speaking of the reading of a poem, he indicates that it is necessary to get involved. In the same way that the reader must be left alone with the poem, everything that is received is to educate, not to inform. You come to the poem with your information: "... The book is a meeting place... it is like going to see a painting or see an exhibition of paintings... do not put on those headphones that tell you a thousand stories of each painting... Everything you know, everything that will help you to look at that painting, you already have it inside... You have to arrive informed, you have to arrive educated...".

For this reason, from arriving informed and trained, the idea was raised of starting a short but intense tour with a group of architecture students and professors with the desire to arrive, to see the MNP again with a different view and to draw both its architecture and some work from its collections. And so, with this will, to express with other strokes everything that would capture our gaze without falling into mere copying.

2 Understanding the Museum. The Information

We know today that it has undergone a unique evolution throughout history. From those first ways of organizing and publicly exhibiting treasures in the Middle Ages, transforming itself to reach the model of a museum that we know today; "... Some museum rooms are conceived as mysterious places full of pieces of extreme rarity, just as they were in the chambers of wonders of Mannerism... Even today, an elite of upper-class connoisseurs regularly tour the exhibition halls of the world in an echo of what Northern

European travellers had done in the 18th century Grand Tour; even today some museums declare their educational mission as their primary objective, heirs to the democratizing ideals of the Enlightenment..." [3].

Therefore, in different ways, this eagerness to gather art collections, trophies or treasures came to manifest itself progressively during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, in the private ateliers of artists, who enjoyed having canvases hanging on their walls as trophies, acquired in a gallery or given by other fellow artists.

Re-reading the texts of P. Valéry, the poet recalls the workshop of his friend Degas as follows: "This workshop without pomp occupied the third floor of the house where Degas lived when I met him, (...). In the first, he had hung his museum, consisting of some paintings he had acquired out of his own pocket or by barter" [4].

The astonished writer wondered about the reason for the visit and the effect of seeing so much beauty in these words: "Have I come to instruct myself, or to seek something I love, or else to do a duty and satisfy appearances? Or could it not even be an exercise of a particular kind to take such a picturesque walk, which is hindered by beauty at every step, and at every moment is diverted right and left by masterpieces among which one must behave like a drunkard among bars?"

Generally speaking, during one or repeated visits to the MNP, several things can happen: stunning, getting lost, or, among others, marvelling at the contemplation of beauty. Introducing the students to what they are going to visit is part of a necessary pedagogical task in which it will help to strengthen their interest, to train in the Arts or to stop and see in another way the place that houses the representations.

3 A Roadmap for the Short Tour. Training

The short trip to the MNP began to take shape with a pedagogical motive: to teach architecture students to contemplate, through drawing, the spaces where the most important works made by the great masters of Art History of all times were exhibited.

Crossing its long corridors and searching among the corners of its rooms for the right atmosphere to draw was marked in each of the strokes made by the young students.

The most interesting thing about this tour is found in the different impressions caused by the direct observation in front of a well-known place, but little visited by the group, as well as in the action of representing through drawing (quick and diverse studies).

The spaces, paintings or pieces were chosen randomly, either for the place they occupied or for the essence of their exhibited works. This experience, with an educative function, began as a result of the elaboration of a roadmap previously prepared by the teaching team. This allowed the students to have (or so the students understood) a kind of security that helped to order and orient themselves in this course of time towards a certain place (Fig. 2).

The group began the tour at the hall of the Muses to draw the space, the figures or any kind of scenes or details. As a beginning for the experience, the first thing taken into account was contemplation, and then inspiration. An overwhelming uneasiness in the face of so much art. What to draw? How to start? How to draw? (Fig. 3) (Fig. 4).



Fig. 2. Tours of the halls of the MNP. Source: authors



Fig. 3. (left) Hall of the Muses. Colour marker. Student: Francisco Catalán.



Fig. 4. (right) Hall of sculpture. Pencil and watercolour. Student: Elena Llácer.

Turning to the texts that Paul Valéry dedicates to a series of reflections on the figure of the master Degas and the circumstances of inspiration, he says that “... The artist liked to say (...) that the muses never argue with each other. They work all day, well separated. When evening falls, the task is accomplished. Together again, they dance, they do not speak.”

Something like this is what happened after finishing a day of two sessions of drawing: telling his own experience and putting on the table what he had felt and drawn was part of that creative dance. That is to say, he united two interesting aspects in drawing: attention and inspiration as the culmination of slow but active contemplation. And, we could say that we captured in a certain way: “the soul of the *Museo del Prado*” [5] (Fig. 5).

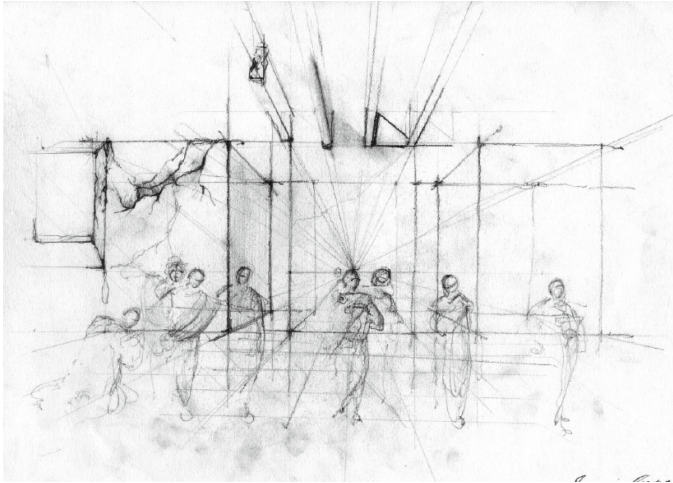


Fig. 5. Central Gallery. Pencil. Student: Ignacio Crespo

4 Drawing Fools

In the process of drawing, there are concerns associated with the shapes and movements of the body, and many connections intervene. We can consider that there is a kind of madness (exaltation of the mood) while drawing: the memory, the instant, the behaviour of the hand, the gaze, the space and again, time (Fig. 6).



Fig. 6. Hall of Velázquez. Marker on paper. Student: Pau Olmo

In that time of wandering through the long corridors, the way of seeing spaces changed: the light, the shadows that cradled an atmosphere with diverse perceptions and perspectives. Each person observes differently and grasps what is different. It is not a matter of being a copyist, but of feeling the museum as your own while drawing (Fig. 7).



Fig. 7. Hall of Goya. Pencil on paper. Student: Jacobo Martínez

In the dance of drawing of this short Tour, we underline what we already knew but sometimes forget, and Valéry reminds us again: “There is an immense difference between seeing a thing without a pencil in your hand and drawing it”. Moreover, he goes on to say: “I cannot pin down my perception of a thing without drawing it (...) I realize I didn’t know what I knew: my best friend’s nose...”.

5 Conclusions

The experience of drawing at the MNP encompassed several concerns that allowed us to “feel the Museum”. We indicate, among others, some facts that defined this short Grand Tour. Seeing architecture from the inside with infinite variations, such as appreciating the artistic pieces on painted wall backgrounds. To contemplate and participate during the reflection of seeing in a work of art what happens inside it, what is hidden, what

is told. Stop and admire the techniques of well-known or anonymous artists. Extract the essential while drawing, without submitting to copying, but to the personal and free enjoyment of expressing the aspects you want to represent: light, shadows, brush details, irregular spots, colour... (Fig. 8) (Fig. 9).



Fig. 8. (left) Jerónimos Cloister. Colour marker on paper. Student: Alexis Ortega.



Fig. 9. (right) Jerónimos cloister. Marker on paper. Student: Bernardo Esquembre.

Finally, this short but educational Tour allowed us to get to know new “wonders” that we had not seen or had not noticed before: details that are hidden behind other details, the immensity of a perspective, scenes, figures, objects, planes drawn on other planes with different supports, scratches, superimpositions, etc. In short, it is a matter of time, time to draw, time to observe, and time to feel.

At the end of the tour we talked about what we had experienced, and among some comments, the students said: “I got lost in front of so much art.”; “I didn’t know several paintings by that famous artist”; “The content of this architecture overwhelms me...”; “I’ve managed to get to know the Museum more slowly”; “I would like to return to this place and have more time to enjoy drawing what I have retained in my memory”; “I’ve come informed, and I’m a little more educated now.” (Fig. 10).



Fig. 10. Group of students and professors at the access hall of the *Museo del Prado*

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