

Embellishment of the urban landscape of Piornal (Caceres). Spain

Abstract

The embellishment of the urban landscape of the Spanish towns is an open subject in many of its regions. In the current project we experiment with the improvement of Piornal, located in the Jerte Valley, Extremadura, Spain. The town is mainly agricultural, whose main farming (planting) is cherry. Its climate is harsh. Its winters are long, plenty of snow and rainy springs as well as autumns.

This weather, put together with the low buying power of its inhabitants, made them change their traditional architecture of the house coming from adobe wall or masonry to one quicker and easier to keep, combining load bearing wall of ceramic bricks structures and facades covered with undulating sheets made of aluminium or fibrocement which protect them from the cold and the humidity. The solution has turned out to be practical but at the expense of the original beauty giving a more industrial and incidental building nature which is in contrast with its natural appearance. This work tries to recover the town identity, its citizens, its habits, its festivities and its landscape, its natural environment and its streets where they live their working or leisure life through the improvement of the appearance of the facades of their houses, now white and covered with plates, changing them into pieces of art.

All the project long, the University of Seville provides the artistic creativity and the technical resources and the town council, the board and keep of the artists through the execution period of the artistic project.

Keywords: embellishment, urban, landscape

Introduction

Coming from the Jerte Valley road (Cáceres, Spain) there are fifteen kilometers of steep slope that end, to the traveler's surprise, in a spectacle of colours gone with a refreshing breeze.

The light shows itself exuberant among the flowers and fruits of the cherry trees, the robustness of their branches and the leaves of the oaks, the beautiful luxuriance of the chestnut, the delicacy of the flower of the heather and the "piorno" (*Cytisus purgans*). All seasons show their palette full of shades, but the Spring and Autumn ones are usually those that impress us the most. When the high point is reaching one thousand two hundred metres, we are arriving at the Camocho mountain and suddenly, without any previous warning, Piornal arises.

The houses and streets of the town lie on a fold of the hillside of Tormantos mountain range and, with exceptions almost hidden, do not honour the beauty of the environment (Figure 1).

The "piornalego" (citizen from Piornal) not only inherited from the Vetones, pre-Roman people of Celtic culture, the highland blood, sturdy and contained, but also the need of sheltering from the extreme environmental conditions. For two thousand five hundred years, the Veton hut has been changing up to finishing, not long time ago in the proliferation of protection sheets on the facades [1]. The neighbourhood justify themselves saying that those sheets are unaesthetic but cheap and efficient against the elements, though they know that from now on they will have to use other system. The town council knocks at the door of the University of Seville demanding solutions and the University which is science, culture and art, far more, is public, offers its knowledge and helps the town.

The proposal is to change the sheet (Figure 2) that covers the facades to immense painting where to capture pieces of art,

applying a learning conciliatory return model.

Similar projects have taken place in other cities in order to improve the visual impact of poor neighbourhoods by means of colour and transformation, this is the case of Bogota, Colombia or Seville, Spain, the neighbourhoods' Puente de Aranda and San Pablo, respectively [2, 3].

This initiative has two main characteristics: the social sensitivity of a council and its citizens and the artistic sensitivity to change the environment to make it more beautiful. Both sensitivities will necessarily be together with the technical capacity to make it possible. These conditions give room for an honest cooperative and collaborative work involving all participants: The artists, the technicians and the politicians.

The team

The agreement was signed by the President of University of Seville, PhD. Joaquin Luque, the mayor of the council of Piornal, D. Ernesto Agudiez Sacristan. PhD. Maria José Garcia del Moral was named Artistic Director of the project and PhD. Madelyn Marrero as Technical Director.

The students group was formed by Alberto Prats Tellez, Aida Hernandez Blasco, Pedro Parra Moreno, Ana Dominguez Corrales, Jose Espaa a Martin y Pablo Caste da Santana. This agreement will last four years and the activity will take place during the months of July of those years (Figure 3).



il. 1. Piornal and its natural landscape



il. 2. A village house covered with aluminium and a closer look to its facade



The sketches

The artistic group and its director have been having meetings weekly for months developing and drawing up several sketches. Two of them are selected. Each artist contributes with his own ideas expressed in two sketches which come to interpret the nature. The nature seen through his creativity and interpretation. The myth comes to earth once again: the personal view of the world with our own personal colour (Figures 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, and 9).

Technical aspects

The surface (area) was prepared through sanding and cleaning to improve the grip surface, made of lacquered aluminium, and

gave it more durability. The paint used is acrylic and then a layer of resistant to ultraviolet ray varnish is laid.

The adhesiveness of the paint was evaluated through the UNE-EN UNE EN 2409:2007 test. The railings cut test [4], which consists of: the cleaning of the basis, grating (6 cuts), brushing and adhesive tape.

The samples were also immersed in water for 14 days and then back to be tested with the railings cut, keeping their original adhesiveness.



il. 3. The Fine Arts professor and students



il. 4. Ana's sketch



il. 5. Aida's sketch



il. 7. Jose's sketch



il. 6. Pedro's sketch



il. 8. Pedro's sketch Figure



il. 9. Pablo's sketch

Execution

Piornal urban landscape was to change, the facades of its houses, now white and covered with sheets changed into pieces of art, immense paintings, people were to live with from then on. (Figure 10). On the other hand, it was not a figurative plastic work as such, it was the private view the artist had of the environment and the motifs which surrounded people's everyday life [5, 6]. They had to get used to see behind the colour and the shapes, they had to learn to see a new transformed reality.

All that had to be treated with all due respect, with patience and pedagogy; we had to exhibit the sketches, listen to opinions, chat and have confidence in what was going in through the eyes passed to the mind and encouraged the pleasant feelings the art arouses.

Since the very beginning, people were passing the way where the painting work was progressing. Some of them used to stop to speak with the artists, some others looked and kept going. We can say that the great majority of the citizens nosed about the pictorial environment.

Talking about the numerous anecdotes, we can mention the one of a man who looking at the various red tonalities the flower of the cherry was taking (see figure 4) wanted to remind us that the colour of that flower was white and that it could not be other way. A long conversation made him begin to think in the artist's mind who, in addition to be able to reflect the nature in his paintings, he could also transform it, interpret it and transmit his sensations (Figures 11 and 12). The finished work is a interpretation of the nature and village surrounding (Figures 13 and 14).

Conclusions

The first reticence of the citizens turned to understanding, so much understanding that many local people asked where they had to sign up for their house to be painted. The fear at first sight had turned into an almost artistic immersion.

Another social interesting aspect which came up was that the art has not got or cannot have a political colour. When the local people came to know that the landlords of the painted houses had not paid anything and neither the council, except the board and keep of the artists mentioned above They were also surprised with the fact that the owners of the houses might



il. 10. Dwelling facade's transformation

have voted for a different political party from the one of the major. The art was, once again above the political colours and above the economic wealth.

These have been the reached objectives:

- The art immersion in the local environment of a town.
- The transmission of the artistic knowledge to a local community.
- The development of human relationship with the art as an excuse.

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il. 11. Cherry tree flowers



il. 12. Cherry tree



il. 13. House number 1



il. 14. House number 2

