

# Luz e dignidade

O monumento de Pepe Galán  
aos Mortos do Portiño.

A Coruña



— Eliseo Fernández — Fernando Souto  
— Pepe Galán — Xavier Seoane  
— John Thompson

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Eliseo Fernández — Fernando Souto Suárez  
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**English translation**

OTR Idiomas (Over The Rainbow): The Escape from O Portiño / A Tribute of Light and Dignity to the Dead of O Portiño /

The events of the past are continually present / Pepe Galán, Biographic Summary / Path to Infinity..

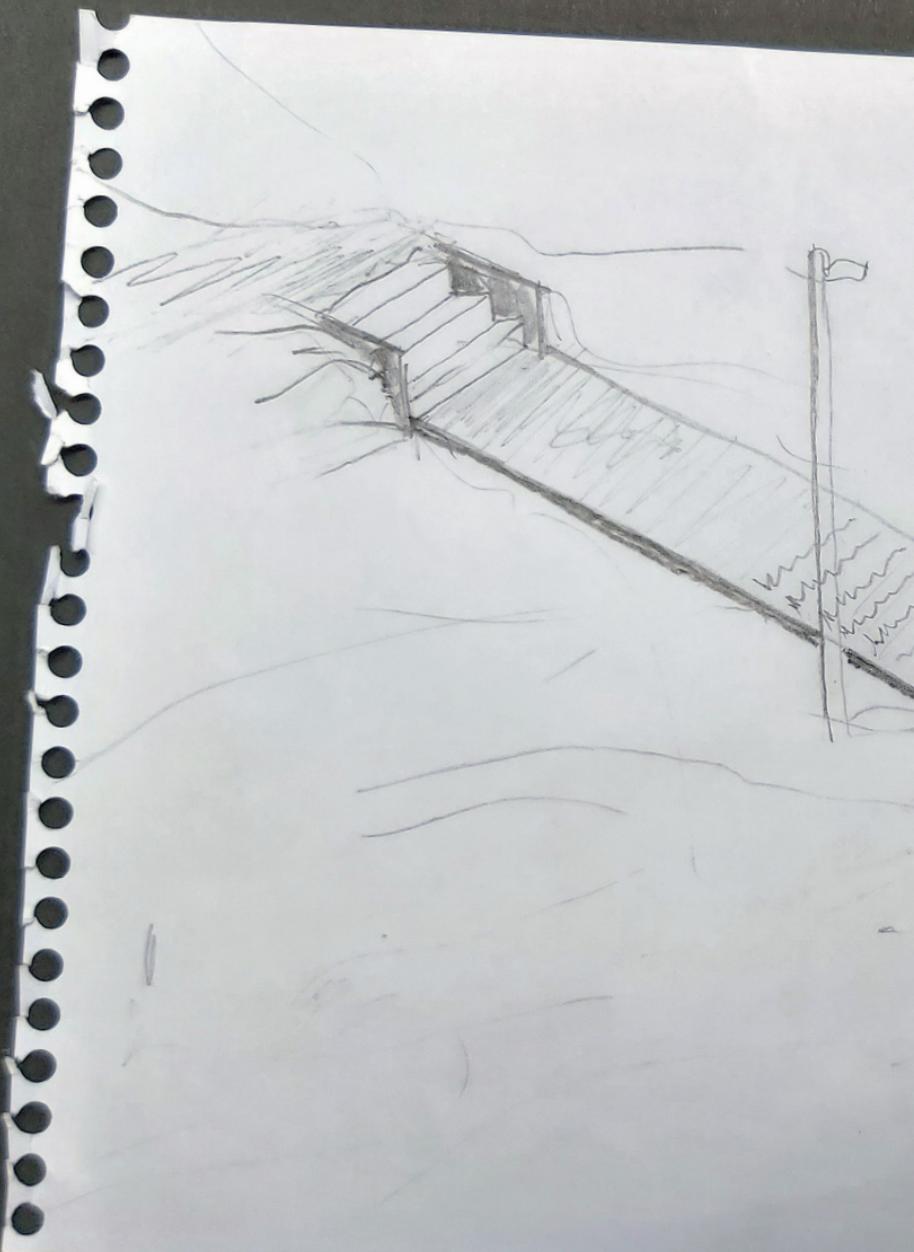
Craig Patterson: The praxis of historical memory: the monument of Pepe Galán

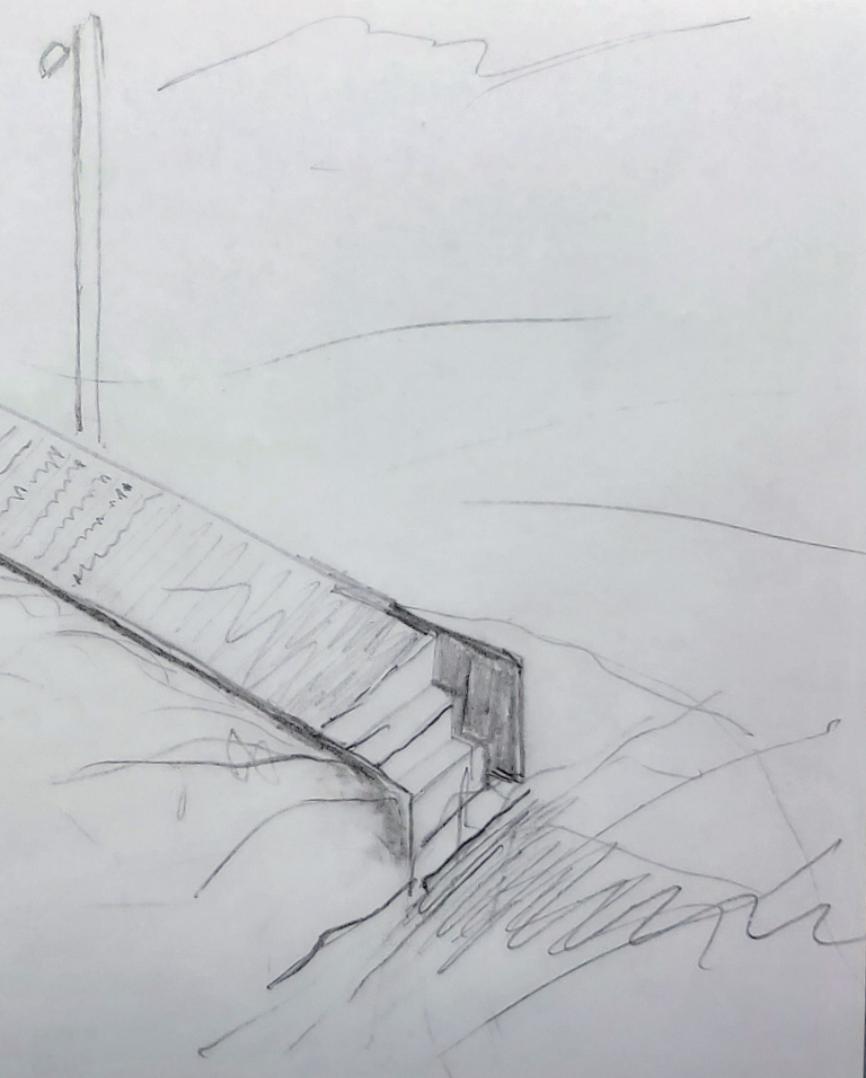
# Comisión pola Recuperación da Memoria Histórica da Coruña

2020









VADOR M. DOMINGO L  
EJANDRO DOPICO SAL  
É GARCÍA VAZQUEZ  
ÓN DÍAZ VALEIRO  
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ONIO LORENZO GAR  
ERICO RIVADULLA G  
LA FUENTE NAVEIR  
EL BERGANTÍNOS  
RO FONTENLA AN  
RODRÍGUEZ SER  
EL TELLADO VIL  
NIO VIDAL GONZ  
EL BALDOMIR V  
N GONZÁLEZ C  
. BOEDO NÚÑE  
RODRÍGUEZ D  
O PAZOS MAC  
PARGA SUA



O feito é que, o 3 de marzo de 1937, varias decenas de antifranquistas, protagonizaron un intento de fuga por mar dende o porto do Portiño.

Agardaban a dous barcos que ían saír faenar dende o porto da Coruña. Estes barcos, serían secuestrados por xente do sindicato pesqueiro da CNT *El Despertar Marítimo*, para ser conducidos as inmediacións do Portiño, coa intención de recoller a xente e marchar cara Francia, Asturias ou zonas aínda en poder da República. A xente ia chegando pouco a pouco de tódalas partes da cidade ao Portiño, máis un grupo de seis homes, perdérонse e foron dar a casa dunha persoa que vivía por alí. Este, alertouse pensando que ían roubalo, dando voces que alertaron á súa vez, a un garda civil que vivía moi preto del. Ese garda civil, deu a voz de alarma, e fixo que as autoridades se mobilizaran pensando que se trataba dun asalto á batería militar que ficaba no Monte de San Pedro.

A Garda Civil e os militares achegáronse á zona, e pouco a pouco foron copando a xente, que non tiña moita saída.

Os que estaban alí, tiráronse ao mar, varios afogaron, outros escaparon e outros foron detidos.

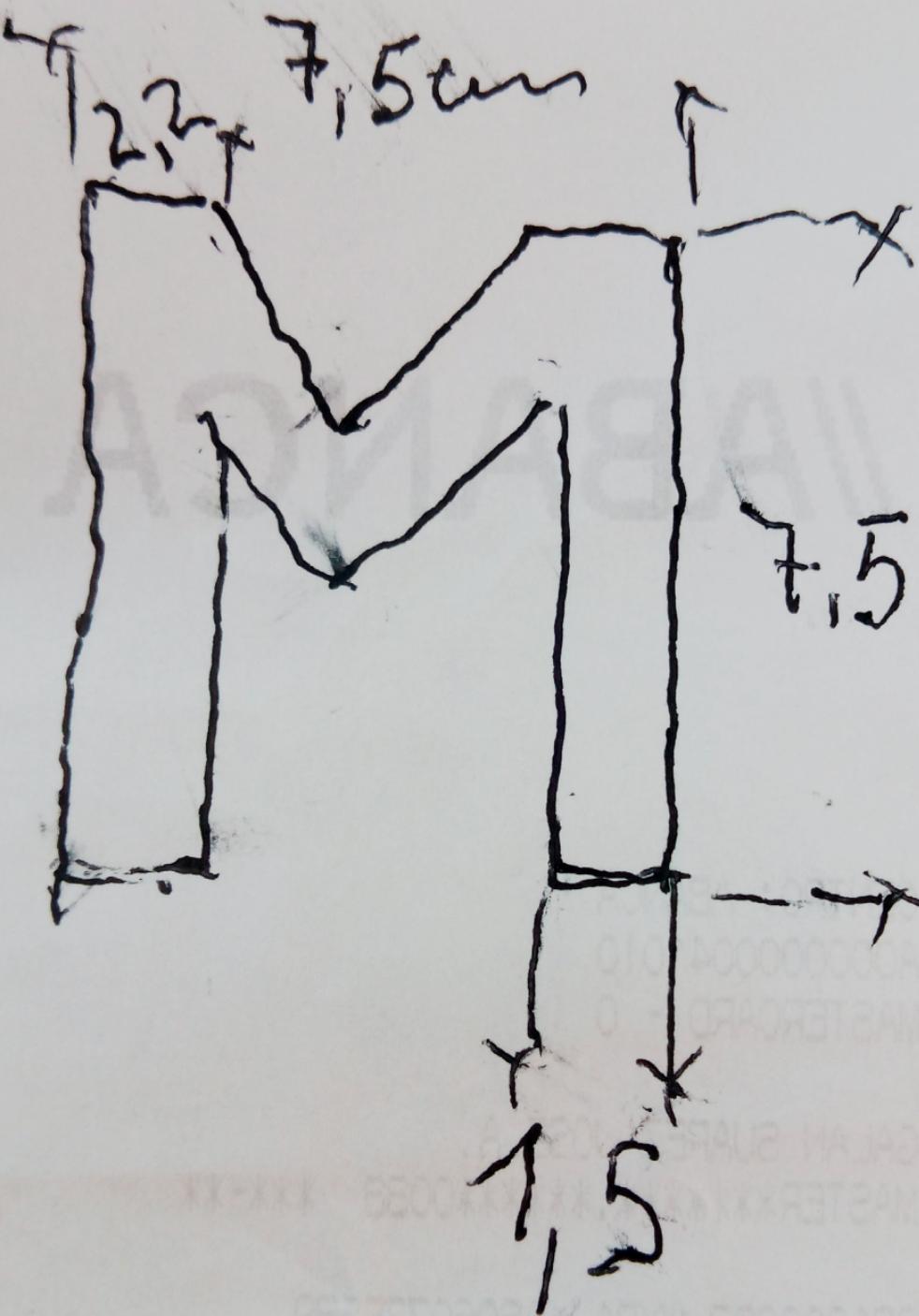
Tódolos detidos, vinte e oito, foron xulgados nun consello de guerra, a algúns deles podían acusalos de actividades anteriores ao golpe militar, máis a maior parte era xente moi nova, e non tiña outra culpa que querer fuxir cara a zona republicana.

Sen embargo, quince destes apresados, foron condeados a morte, nun consello de guerra e foron executados meses despois, en outubro do mesmo ano trinta e sete.

Houbo incluso outros dous homes que participaron nesa fuxida que morreron posteriormente a consecuencia dela: José Antonio Boedo Núñez, que foi detido posteriormente, nunha casa onde fora agochado, e tamén foi executado, por ser republicano e militante da CNT. O outro detido, Manuel Parga Suárez, morre por enfermidade no cárcere da Coruña, sen recobrar nunca a liberdade.







## Luz e dignidade aos Mortos do Portiño

**Fernando Souto Suárez\***

Presidente da Comisión pola Recuperación  
da Memoria Histórica da Coruña (CRMH)

No ano 2007 convocamos un concurso de ideas que tivo unha moi intensa participación, complicando positivamente tomar unha decisión.

A obra seleccionada foi a presentada por Pepe Galán, que tras dúas votacións foi consensuada polos membros do grupo de traballo que tivemos a honra de participar.

A execución do monumento correu a cargo de Galán, ocupándose de todo o proceso, algo que debemos agradecer.

Lembro unha chamada de Pepe desde o taller de metalurxia Maximino Seoane na Coruña, onde o artista xa traballaba na peza escultórica, despois de

\* En 2007 Fernando Souto Suárez foi coordinador do grupo de traballo sobre o monumento aos Mortos do Portiño.

que os técnicos axustaran milimétricamente o proceso construtivo.

O autor cos seus colaboradores enchían de chumbo os ocos que os nomes deixaban no metal. Unha e outra colada, kilos e más kilos do mesmo material das balas con que mataron a moitos homes e mulleres libres.

Axiña a noticia da feitura do monumento chegou a todolos traballadores do taller. Uns miraban curiosos contemplando como o chumbo líquido acubillábbase no leito baleirado polas letras de aceiro cortén. Outros preguntaban ou respostaban “eu non sabia disto do Portiño...”, os más observaban nun silencio respectuoso, logo cada quén ía a súa encomenda.

Aqueles obreiros curtidos, de grande profesionalidade, eran partícipes dalgún xeito da ollada dun pasado que esvaraba sobre unha senda férrica reivindicativa chantaba cara o futuro.

.....

Dende moi pequeno sentín falar do que aconteceu no pequeno porto das aforas da cidade da Coruña que coñecemos como O Portiño. Nacín no barrio dos mariñeiros, un barrio coruñés onde foron vivir xentes do mar nos anos 50. Moitos dos vecinos eran naturais dos lugares de Lourido, Peruleiro, Labañou, San Roque... do contorno do Portiño.

Na miña familia falábbase duns fuxidos que foron

mortos, caeron presos ou escaparon na trampa na que se converteu este lugar. Mais non eran uns descoñecidos: eran membros da nosa familia, eran os nosos veciños... o pai de... o irmán de... o marido de... Non sabía os seus nomes mais si coñecía ás súas familias.

Eu non sabía por que estaban fuxidos, do que fuxían, por que os perseguían, mais si tiña a sensación de que eran boa xente.

Dicían que non fixeran nada, mais eu pensaba que algo tiveran que facer; co tempo entereime que querían cambiar o mundo, darle volta a tortilla como conta Mariquiña Villaverde.

Cando Antón Patiño nos emocionou lembrando a memoria de ferro comprometímonos e fixemos noso o obxectivo de recuperar os nomes, o lugar, os feitos e contribuir a coñecer un pouco mellor a nosa historia.

Comezamos convocando una charla no mesmo lugar do Portiño para que o investigador Dionisio Pereira, o poeta mariñeiro Serafín Mourelle e o escritor Manolo Rivas nos achegara aos feitos.

Aquel día 23 de febreiro do ano 2006 os que acudimos aquela chamada decidimos xuntar os nosos esforzos para recuperar esta parte da nosa memoria.

O monumento xa forma parte do lugar; agora desexamos tamén que este libro axude a mellorar a capacidade de comprensión do noso pasado, una historia sempre aberta...

# Así se fixo



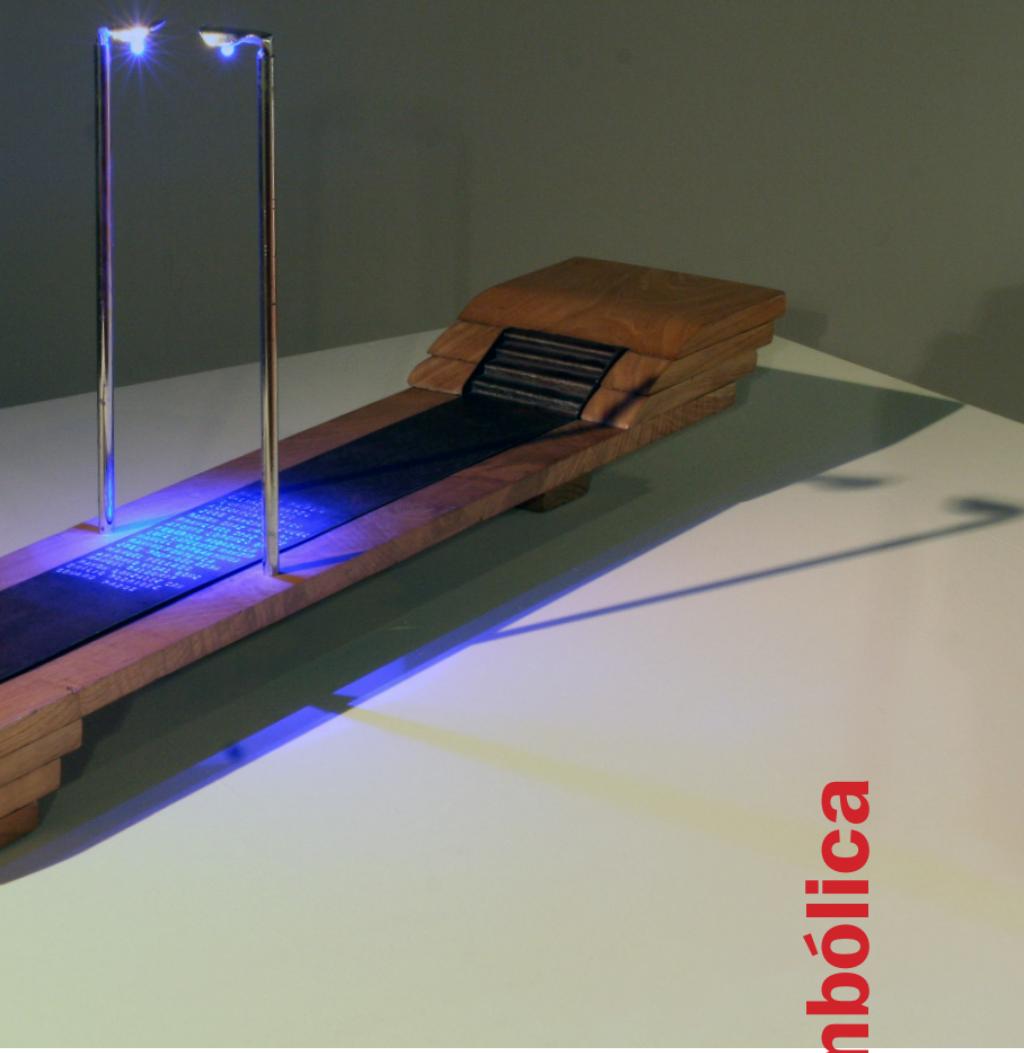
## coherencia formal

# e simbólica

Fotos da realización no taller de Maximino Seoane  
e da montaxe no Portiño por cortesía do artista.

Páxinas: 50–53 Pablo Anllo, 54–55 Amador Iravedra

>>>



**unha obra que se integrase**



**na paisaxe**



# cara ao horizonte



**mariño**



7380x200

Pepe GACAM

485108

ox20 (corten)

v

18

**“elevación da dignidade”**







ACEIRO  
IN  
CORTEN





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a  
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**dezarmones batidos**





**recheos de chumbo**







# escadas de fuxida



# ou de reencontro



**un corredor de 20 m  
de largo e 2 m de ancho**





**que a obra fose respectuosa**



**osa coa contorna**



A photograph of a grassy hillside under a clear blue sky. In the foreground, a wooden boardwalk or path leads up the hill. The hillside is covered in green grass and yellow flowers. The text "un corredor en" is overlaid in red at the bottom right.

**un corredor en**

**que vai de sureste a noroeste**

**aceiro cortén**

**un elemento  
secuencial**



**presenza  
contingua**



A night photograph of a road with streetlights and a hillside. The scene is dimly lit by streetlights, with a bright starburst effect from one light pole in the center-right. A road curves from the left foreground towards the right. In the background, there's a grassy hillside and some buildings on the left.

**semellando  
o latexo  
do corazón**











A vertical photograph of a coastal landscape. In the foreground, a large, light-colored rectangular plaque is mounted on a metal frame. The plaque is inscribed with numerous names in a dark, vertical font. The background features a calm sea with distant land or hills on the horizon under a cloudy sky. To the right, a grassy embankment leads down to the water. In the far distance, a small town with colorful buildings and a road with a car are visible.

JOSE A BOEDO NUÑEZ  
EMILIO CODIGUEZ DOLAN  
FERNANDO PARES SUAREZ  
MANUEL PARGA



SALVADOR M. DOMINGO LLISO  
ALEJANDRO DOPICO SALETA  
JOSE GARCIA VAZQUEZ  
RAMON DIAZ VALEIRO  
FRANCISCO DIAZ MORENO  
ANTONIO LORENZO GARCIA  
FEDERICO RIVADULLA GOMEZ  
LUIS LAFUENTE NAVIERA  
MANUEL BERGANTINOS POSE  
RAMIRO FONTENLA ANDUJAR  
JOSÉ RODRÍGUEZ SERANTES  
MANUEL TELLADO VILLAR  
ANTONIO VIDAL GONZÁLEZ  
MANUEL BALDOMIR VAZQUEZ  
RAMÓN GONZALEZ CANOSA  
JOSÉ A. BOEDO NÚÑEZ  
EMILIO RODRÍGUEZ DOLDÁN  
GENARO PAZOS MACEIRA  
MANUEL PARGA SUAREZ

# **Os feitos foron... xa son presenza continua**

**Pepe Galán**

Artista, autor do monumento aos Mortos do Portiño

A Coruña, 21.10.19. Escribo estas liñas, uns días antes da exhumación do golpista Franco... Mentre os asasinados seguen nas gabias... «¿Hasta cando durará este gran enterro? Non chores que poden escoitarte», escribía Luís Pimentel no seu poema «Cunetas».

## **Cara ao Portiño:**

Decenas de persoas fuxían coma regos de auga, coa intención de confluír na fonte de santa Margarida para reorganizarse, e volver de novo a se ramificar para desembocar traxicamente no monte e nas augas salgadas do Portiño.

## **O compromiso:**

É fundamental subliñar o traballo infatigábel que desenvolven os homes e mulleres dunha estrutura de cidadáns libres como a Comisión pola Recuperación da Memoria Histórica da Coruña (CRMHAC). Do tempo no que se ideou o monumento, cómpre salientar

<<< Pepe Galán no monumento / Foto: Gabriel Tizón

a colaboración do goberno socialista, xunto ao goberno bipartito coruñés do PSOE - BNG, corresponsabeis da construción deste monumento.

Polo compromiso con Galiza e pola liberdade foron pasados polas armas moitos artistas e intelectuais. Lembro no 2006 unha experiencia abraiante na que participei, guiados por Antón Patiño Regueira, nun roteiro da morte polo monte de Bens (preto do Portiño) e Meicende. No primeiro, Patiño describía diante dun penedo, que alí fusilaron a Luís Huíci, xastre, artista plástico... No segundo, baixamos cara Meicende, e noso guía con precisión, sinalou a gabia onde mataron o pintor Francisco Miguel. Anos antes, no 2000, fóramos un feixe de artistas visuais, poetas e outras persoas (se non me falla a memoria) ao cemiterio de Bértoa, Carballo, A Coruña, onde se supón que fica soterrado nunha fosa común Francisco Miguel... A eles vaia tamén este Monumento do Portiño.

A evolución do pensamento artístico como en tódas as disciplinas é permanente. Nese vieiro, o artista comprométese política, social e medio ambientalmente coa creación de obras que activan. Atrás queda a arte propagandista dos poderosos, agora o artista pode situarse e contribuír as reivindicacións cidadáns.

### O monumento:

Cando me convidaron a participar no Concurso de Ideas para realizar unha escultura conmemorativa,

o primeiro que fixen foi visitar o lugar, interesándome de xeito especial o espazo a intervir, un monte que foi creado cos residuos procedentes da cidade da Coruña, e agora ía ser un espazo público, con capacidade de rexeneración como lugar de convivencia, case unha metáfora da “elevación da dignidade” sobre o lixo da nosa memoria.

Estudei detidamente a ubicación ademais da súa orografía, intentando que a obra fose respectuosa coa contorna e que se integrase na paisaxe, alén da correspondente coherencia formal e simbólica.

Con estes fundamentos, proxectei un corredor de 20 m de longo e 2 m de ancho en aceiro cortén, que vai de sureste a noroeste, con escadas de fuxida ou de reencontro, que soben ou baixan do monte, van ou veñen do mar.

Un pano con dezanove nomes batidos no estrado de metal, recheos de chumbo, como o que aplicaron nos seus fusilamentos, e luz azul cobalto de dous farois enfocando cara aos nomes, un elemento secuencial semellando o latexo do corazón, querendo representar con isto un xeito de presenza continua.

Por último, a orientación e a paisaxe, completaron e dotaron a pasarela da sensación de liberdade que imprime cando a ollada enfoca cara ao horizonte mariño, coa Illa do Vandabal navegando sobre o océano Atlántico.

**Pepe Galán** (A Coruña 1955).

Iniciase na pintura a vez que experimenta con outros soportes como a serigrafía, o gravado, a fotografía e o vídeo, medios que son compartidos co seu traballo escultórico.

- Concorre en Feiras e exposicións nacionais e internacionais: Europa e América (EE.UU.) suponlle un importante contacto coas diferentes opcións artísticas, históricas e contemporáneas.
- Partícipe e cofundador respectivamente de A Galga e Gruporzán.
- Representante da xerazón que se dá a coñecer na década dos oitenta, tras comeza-la súa experimentación plástica na inmediatamente anterior
- Galán irá creando unha obra que transita por distintas etapas: o tecido en volume, o metal, materiais translúcidos como plástico e cristal ou o audiovisual.
- Forma parte da Comisión executiva da Asociación de Artistas AGAV, iniciando unha etapa de compromiso a prol da política cultural e social dos/as artistas. Integrarse na Plataforma Burla Negra, realizando accións de activismo cultural.
- Contribúe a creación da revista de arte *Artnotes*, de difusión internacional.

- Cofundador do colectivo multidisciplinar Radio Buguina.
- Deseña entre outros, os premios AGAPI 1999, para Asociación Galega de Produtoras Independentes, Escultura institucional honorífica da CRMH AC, (...)
- Bolseiro pola Fundación Arte e Dereito.
- Dirixe obradoiros e colabora en cursos: Mariñán, Deputación da Coruña. MAC Museo de Arte Contemporánea. CEFORE Xunta de Galiza. IES Salvador de Madariaga, A Coruña. Museo de Belas Artes da Coruña. (...)
- Leva a cabo instalacións efémeras na urbe, así como, en espazos naturais.
- Premiado no concurso de ideas para realizar o monumento as vítimas da represión franquista no Portiño.
- Outórganselle o I Premio no IX CERTAME DE CURTAS AS-PG. 2019. Recibe diferentes encomendas para espazos públicos como, esculturas e murais de grandes dimensións, executadas especialmente en aceiro cortén...

**Obra Pública:**

*Ferroetecido en liña curva* 1990 no Centro de Saúde de Cereda.  
*Copa do Sol*, 1994, Parque escultórico da Torre de Hércules da Coruña. *Vieiros de seu*, 1999,

Praza de San Domingos en Lugo.  
Remando cara ao vento, 2006, Paseo  
Marítimo de Neda Ferrol. Mortos do  
Portiño, 2008, O Portiño, A Coruña.  
Mayday 03, 2008, Acuario Finisterrae,  
Museos Científicos da Coruña (...)

[www.pepegalan.com](http://www.pepegalan.com)  
[pepegalan@pepegalan.com](mailto:pepegalan@pepegalan.com)



#### **Exposicións individuais:**

Entre 1984 e 2019 efectúa múltiples exposicións persoais, parte delas son as series: *Tecido e tensión*, *Ferroetecido*, *O dentro pechado*, *Fendas e ancoras no vento*, *Para-brisa*, *Mayday*, *De onte para maña (retrospectiva)*, *Lume e ferro, a producción queimada ou A volta dunha ausencia (itinerante por Galiza)*. *Encaixa voandeira M1 e esbozos* + presentación da curta *O combate fértil*.

#### **Exposicións colectivas:**

A súa obra foi mostrada en Galicia, España, Portugal, Italia e Francia.

#### **Museos, coleccións públicas e privadas:**

Selección; Museo Carlos Maside, Sada A Coruña. Colección Banco Exterior de España. Xunta de Galicia. Deputación da Coruña. Fondos Biblioteca Nacional Madrid. Museo de Arte Contemporanea MAC. Fundación Abanca. Museos Científicos da Coruña. Museo Belas Artes, A Coruña. Amigos dos Museos de Galicia, Portas Ártabras, A Coruña (...)

SALVADOR M. DOMINGO LLIS  
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AMÓN DÍAZ VALEIRO  
FRANCISCO DÍAZ MORENO  
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DERICO IRIVADULLA GÓM  
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NUEL BERGANTINOS PC  
MIRO FONTENLA ANDU  
SÉ RODRÍGUEZ SERAN  
NUEL TELLADO VILLAR  
TONIO VIDAL GONZÁLE  
NUEL BALDOMIR VAZ  
ÓN GONZALEZ CANC  
É A. BOEDO NÚÑEZ  
TO RODRIGUEZ DOL  
ARO PAZOS MACEI  
NUEL PARGA SUÁRE

# Pasarela ao infinito

**Xavier Seoane**

Escritor

O monumento do escultor Pepe Galán no Portiño, veciño á cidade da Coruña, en conmemoración dos republicanos coruñeses que intentaron fuxir por mar e foron asasinados polos militares poucos meses despois do golpe militar, esperta na imaxinación, de maneira espontánea, o mundo funerario das estelas que, gravadas nos sartegos, chegaron a nós desde as fondonas dos tempos. Incluso, malia as lóxicas e grandes diferenzas, pode evocar o espírito conmemorativo latente nos epigramas da conmovedora *Antoloxía palatina*, ese espléndido legado de Greza no que se evocan de forma breve (e cunha digna, ética, humana e solidaria *gravitas*) múltiples personaxes e incidencias humanas. Mais no caso da escultura do Portiño non hai lugar para a literatura ou a evocación poética, pois o escultor optou por unha

austera sobriedade, de modo que o único documento textual é a sucesión dos nomes das dezanove vítimas antifranquistas.

Porque Pepe Galán, home preocupado pola memoria histórica e artista militante nas causas éticas e sociais, sabedor da transcendencia que supón para unha sociedade o coñecemento veraz do pasado e a lóxica reparación das vítimas e dos seus descendentes, quixo facer unha intervención escultórica que servise tanto de homenaxe como de documento evocador deses tráxicos feitos, onde o intento de fuga por mar de case un cento de anarquistas rematou no tráxico masacre duns homes cuxo único delicto era a condición democrática, un elevado grao de conciencia política e a demanda de xustiza social.

Como a homenaxe era ás vítimas, o escultor adoptou a estratexia de agachar o seu protagonismo, realizando unha peza sumamente discreta, de achega conceptual e minimalista, que respectase incluso, coa súa humildade, a contorna, integrándose no espazo e na orografía de maneira natural: ese anfiteatro verde de vastas perspectivas oceánicas que abraia pola súa maxestosa beleza e escala.

Por iso decidiu traballar a nivel de terra (símbolo da morte, do enterramento, da perennidade?) e de aire (símbolo aberto a resonancias de esperanza, de altura, de liberdade, de soños e arelas non por incumpridos menos presentes?).

Canto aos materiais, usou o aceiro cortén para o corredor, que de forma intencionada contrasta o valor expresivo da súa textura ferruxenta de cor vermelliza-castaña co verdor vizoso da vexetación. Canto ás letras cos nomes das vítimas gravados na superficie plana, botou man do chumbo, como testemuña do mineral co que lles encheron o corpo.

A peza concíbese formalmente como un camiño de 20 metros, que tan só ascende e descende nos dous pequenos tramos de chanzos extremos, dirixíndose por un lado a unha difícil ou imposible fuga por terra, e, polo outro, a un horizonte marítimo inalcanzable, aínda que fondamente desexado e, xa para sempre, baleiro.

Pepe Galán quixo deixar así a testemuña dun alicerzarse ou fundamentarse na terra mais tamén dun *itinerare*, dun camiño. Un camiño no que, como nos petróglifos das rochas da nosa costa, figura a ladaíña gravada dos nomes-signo dos protagonistas, que quen sabe se algún día a terra cubrirá, mais gardarán, como un petróglifo metálico, a evidencia dunha historia, dunha traxedia, dunhas vidas truncadas.

Na obra de Pepe Galán está ausente a retórica. Na súa nudez, na súa extrema sinxeleza, no seu ascetismo radical, permítenos transitar: sentar nos chanzos, desprazarnos a través da pasarela e do campo circundante ou apoiarnos nas barras que sosteñen as luces. Unhas luces que, por certo, acadan

na noite unha relevancia simbólica desexada polo autor, que actuou neste caso como unha especie de Dan Flavin da nocturnidade, xerando un efecto escultórico de carácter óptico e inmaterial, que expresa un estado de ánimo e crea unha transfiguración espacial. Primeiro, porque dotou ás lámpadas dunha sutil luz azul cobalto, aurática e celeste, que expande a escultura no espazo circundante, e establece un contraste lumínico coa longa noite de pedra dunha escuridade ambiental non menos simbólica. Segundo, porque fixo que unha das luces palpebrexase levemente, creando así un certo símbolo da fraxilidade, máis tamén a constatación simbólica dun latexar, dun alentar...

A obra está concibida desde a extrema contención representativa, dentro da abstracción minimalista e conceptual. De aí o seu plantexamento cromático case monocromo, no que destaca a textura áspera e rugosa do aceiro cortén en contraste coas letras cuñadas de chumbo, creándose tamén un xogo de oposición entre a luz diúrna e a nocturna e entre a iluminación natural e a artificial en azul.

Mais esa concepción rigorosa e contida non impide un rico simbolismo. As escaleiras, e o camiño, son símbolos de tránsito, de movemento, de fuga. Os dous farois crean unha especie de pórtico ou porta que enmarca o horizonte co que a obra se referencia. Ese horizonte remarcado simboliza a liberdade. O chumbo, segundo se viu, testemuña as balas, a violencia destrutiva. A elección do aceiro cortén,

e o plantexamento construtivo, evocan a cultura industrial, da que talvez algúns dos represaliados participaban, e aspecto que está moi presente, desde hai anos, na praxe escultórica de Pepe Galán.

Por outra parte, e con excepción da luz, que simboliza o tenue, o quebradizo, o vulnerable, e quizais tamén o mínimo latexo da vida ou da esperanza, a elección dos materiais está en función da duración: de garantir a pervivencia da memoria fronte á erosión e aos estragos do tempo e do medio natural. A sensación de espazo, de baleiro, tan presente na obra e no lugar, tematiza a ausencia, a morte, e establece unha atmosfera de desprotección, de perda, de soildade.

Unha obra, coma outras do seu autor, feita desde a discreción, a intencionada sinxeleza e a mesura. Concibida como un ámbito para a lembranza, a solidariedade e a meditación. Unha especie de pórtico ao infinito ou de tránsito a unha imposible esperanza.

Recordo ter ido a ver a peza en diversas ocasións climáticas, lumínicas ou ambientais. Nunha das últimas, nunha noite dura e chuviosa, na compañía do escritor Méndez Ferrín. A intensa chuvia caendo oblicuamente, o vento racheado e tenaz e a sombra mesta contribuíán a unha escenografía da adversidade que non lle ía nada mal a esta obra silenciosamente expresiva que evoca o intento de fuxida e o asasinato deses antifranquistas coruñeses vilmente executados por individuos con entrañas de chumbo e alma de aceiro.



# A praxe da memoria histórica: o monumento de Pepe Galán\*

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Erixidos desde o final do século pasado, os monumentos que simbolizan os crimes fascistas desempeñan un papel problemático no proceso da recuperación da memoria histórica. A grande mayoría deles abandonáronse unha vez inaugurados, e más que símbolos do recordo agora son recordos do esquecemento. Os marcadores materiais da memoria son complexos e é más probábel que funcionen en contra da memoria que a prol dela. Unha excepción é a obra de Pepe Galán colocada no valigato que desemboca na cala do Portiño, localizado na cidade da Coruña. O monumento alude ao masacre dun grupo de militantes de esquerda que tentaron fuxir desde

\* Este artigo reproducícese por cortesía do seu autor e da revista *Madrygal*, que o publicou no seu número 22 (2019).

O Portiño até Asturias, aínda na legalidade republicana.

Feito en aceiro dunha cor entre vermello e laranxa debido ao óxido, o monumento é unha pasarela de vinte metros de longo e dous metros de largo. A pasarela apunta ao mar e ten escadas nos dous extremos, unhas que descen cara ao mar e outras que soben na dirección oposta. No medio aparecen en chumbo os nomes dos fuxidos asasinados, e acima deles dous focos de luz azulada sostidos por postes de alumíneo de sete metros. Cando chega o anoitecer, os focos acéndense e un deles chisca en intervalos duns cinco segundos.

Este monumento, erixido en 2008, nunca foi analizado malia posuír potencial para avanzar a causa da memoria histórica<sup>1</sup>. Os lugares simbolizados poden ser acicates para unha comunidade manter a súa memoria; son patrimonio material e resisten o paso do tempo, sobre todo se se tratar dos lugares onde aconteceron os feitos. Estes denomináñanse «lugares de represión» e a súa forza deriva do seu valor testemuñal dos crimes. Os monumentos levantados despois dos feitos, neste caso no posfranquismo, adoitan ter menos poder evocador, unha vez que a súa razón de ser non é fornecer autenticidade aos feitos, senón interpretalos.

Recordo a construción de Pepe Galán como a primeira na que reparei cando decidín facer un estudo sobre os monumentos conmemorativos en

1. Amaya Caunedo fai un breve resumo das características do monumento e do suceso que representa, mais trátase dun texto descriptivo, non analítico (2013: 79-80).

Galiza. Orballaba e anoitecía entre lusco e fusco, e impactáronme as lámpadas que creaban unha aura azul. Quería baixar ver todo de perto, mais o orballo converteuse en choiva e daquela tiven que adiar a visita para outra ocasión.

## **1. A fuxida frustrada e a reivindicación da súa memoria**

Chovía tamén a noite do massacre do tres de marzo de 1937. O sindicato anarquista «El Despertar Marítimo» organizou unha fuxida para aproximadamente cen persoas perseguidas polo recentemente instaurado réxime fascista. Os fuxidos agardaban en botes para que, cando se dese o sinal, alcanzasen dous bous que supostamente os esperaban mar afora (Pereira 2009: 130, Fernández 2009a: 164). A meta era chegar a Asturias, que aínda non caera en mans dos sublevados. Porén, o escape non se pudo levar a cabo porque a Garda Civil descubriu o plano. Disparando contra os fuxidos, estes escaparon «gabeando monte arriba entre rochas e toxerías», ou abeirando a costa «quer a nado, quer nalgúnha buceta que xa estivese preparada» (Pereira 2010: 410). Antón Patiño, unha testemuña ocular do evento, describe: «Os homes trataban de fuxir dos disparos nadando ou subindo por penedos e rochas. Algunxs foron presos, bastantes feridos e outros aparecerían aboiados nas praias e cantís días despois» (2005: 72). Vinte e sete foron detidos, quince fusilados, un morreu no cárcere

e polo menos tres afogaron. Dos asasinados, tres das vítimas tiñan menos de vinte e un anos (Lamela 1998: 119, Fernández 2009b: 190-191, Pereira 2009: 130 e 2010: 410).

Até 2005 este evento era praticamente descoñecido. A memoria existía de xeito espectral como se mostra na reflexión de Fernando Souto que, natural do bairro dos mariñeiros a carón do Portiño, escribe que na súa familia se falaba do evento, mais sen explicar como e por que acaeceu, e sen especificar como se chamaban os fuxidos: «Eu non sabía por que estaban fuxidos, de que fuxían, por que os perseguían, mais si tiña a sensación de que eran boa xente» (2009: 5).

O motor atrás da reivindicación do Portiño foi Antón Patiño. En 1996 a súa iniciativa deuse a coñecer nun artigo de Xosé Luís Méndez Ferrín publicado no *Faro de Vigo* (Souto 2005). En 2005 Patiño publicou o seu libro testemuñal *Memoria de Ferro* e contactou coa Comisión pola Recuperación da Memoria Histórica da Coruña (CRMH), e foi através das presentacións do libro organizadas por este grupo como se decidiu levantar un monumento (Monge 2008, Ventureira 2007). A Comisión organizou un concurso de ideas e presentáronse varios proxectos. Os concursos, moi comúns en Alemaña no que respecta á creación de marcadores referidos ao Holocausto, no se fixeron en Galiza agás neste caso. A vantaxe dos concursos é que abren o proceso de monumentalización á cidadanía. E se se producir un debate social, o proceso permea aínda máis o foro público.

A historia do Portiño no posfranquismo tamén incide na nosa análise. En 1977, o Concello da Coruña decidiu converter o lugar nun vertedoiro. Sería imposíbel atopar unha metáfora máis apta para a ocultación da memoria histórica. No mesmo período en que os adeptos da ditadura destruíán a eito documentos comprometedores, tapar o val con 200.000 toneladas de lixo foi unha iniciativa brillante para se desfacer dun lugar simbolizado polo trauma, aínda que o simbolismo naquel tempo fose fragmentario e desartellado. «Era un lugar», contou Galán, «cheirón como podía ser en Pontevedra a ENCE; dependía de como sopraba o vento, viñan os cheiros para A Coruña» (entrevista co autor). Debido á saturación inxente, en setembro de 1996 o vertedoiro derrubouse e levou pola fronte carros, barcos e matou un home cuxo corpo nunca apareceu. Segundo Galán, a derruba «foi como un volcán sen lava» (entrevista)<sup>2</sup>.

Esta transformación de trauma en lixo recorda, aínda que á inversa, a renovación da illa de San Simón que, efectuada entre 1998 e 2005, converteu

**2.** Esta interpretación do lixo como un soterramento do trauma non se pode probar empíricamente, visto que para iso farían falta documentos escritos ou testemuños orais que puidesen verificala. Con todo, consideramos que non se debe desbotar esta apreciación porque a iniciativa de crear o vertedoiro se realizou cando aínda restaban abundantes testemuñas directas do evento cuxos recordos eran molestos para a casta política, afervoada defensora do esquecemento abandeirado pola monarquía constitucional. Tampouco excluímos a posibilidade de que a decisión de enviar o lixo ao Portiño fose influída polo inconsciente colectivo condicionado pola narrativa do tardofranquismo, que promovía a supresión dos feitos e a memoria. Esta hipótese é coherente coas decisións tomadas na transición á democracia e coa política da desmemoria.

o meirande símbolo dos crimes fascistas en Galiza nunha fantasía tropical presidida por Jesús Pérez Varela, César Portela e o Capitán Nemo. Aquí, no canto de lixo, foi beleza e exotismo que serven a mesma función de soterrar os recordos que poidan ameazar o sistema<sup>3</sup>.

Mesmo así, é preciso diferenciar entre estes tipos de ocultacións, que son reversíbeis (en maior ou menor grao), e as destrucións de lugares de memoria que son irreversíbeis. A más danosa en España foi a demolición da praza de touros de Badaxoz, sen dúbida o maior símbolo do exterminio franquista, ideada e executada por Juan Carlos Rodríguez Ibarra.

A recuperación do Portiño foi un fito para o movemento da memoria histórica en Galiza. Canda a inauguración, houbo actos con persoeiros da esquerda que axudaron a espallar o coñecemento da historia traumática; e para os familiares e achegados das vítimas que asistiron a esta reivindicación pública dos seus seres amados, o monumento supuxo un aceiramento de orgullo e ánimo. Mesmo así, é preciso recoñecer unha falla seria que prevalece en praticamente todos os proxectos e actos do movemento memorialista de todo o Estado: a grande ausencia da mocidade. Esta realidade é un claro indicio de que a memoria histórica, se non se tomaren medidas inmediatas

3. Sobre esta desfeita da memoria, véxase Thompson 2017.

e radicais, vai morrer talvez na cuarta xeración e seguramente na quinta<sup>4</sup>.

## 2. O fetichismo e a perda da memoria

Robert Musil iniciou en 1957 unha liña crítica cara ao fenómeno dos monumentos. As súas observacións son demoledoras: «Non hai nada neste mundo tan invisíbel como un monumento (...) están impregnados de algo que nos repele (...) Non se pode decir que non nos fixamos neles, senón que eles non se fixan en nós, eluden as nosas facultades perceptivas (...) incítannos a vandalizalos» (1957: 61-62)<sup>5</sup>. Aínda que acertado, este discurso é determinista; non abre a porta a outras formas de crear e usar os monumentos.

James Young, unha figura eminente neste eido, desconfía tamén dos monumentos; por exemplo: «[A] memoria sen consecuencias contén as sementes da súa propia destrución» (1994: 15)<sup>6</sup>. As súas análises sobre as construcións estéticas que representan

4. A primeira xeración –case desaparecida no ano en que se escribe este artigo (2019)– son as persoas que viviron a guerra civil e con suficiente idade para teren recordos da época. A segunda xeración, entre oitenta e cinco e cincuenta e cinco anos, naceu ou no final da contenda ou no inicio da ditadura. A terceira xeración naceu ou no final da ditadura ou ao principio do posfranquismo. A cuarta xeración son os bisnetos das testemuñas directas da guerra e os primeiros da quinta veñen de nacer ou están a piques. Véxase Valverde 2014: 69-79, quen explica as características das diferentes xeracións.

5. Tradución miña do inglés. A obra orixinal está en alemán.

6. Tradución miña do inglés.

os eventos e as vítimas do Holocausto son igual de aplicábeis –e mesmo más– aos monumentos galegos e aos do resto do Estado. O que diferencia Young de Musil é que defende unha posición en xeral favorábel, malia as súas sospeitas, cara aos monumentos. Nós defendemos unha posición non determinista mais tampouco tan positiva. As pescudas que fixemos sobre esta cuestión leváronnos a non confiar nas construcións simbólicas. Encanto para Young un monumento é efectivo se conseguir atraer a atención dos transeúntes, para nós só é efectivo se desempeñar un rol transformador, se se usar como impulsor para avanzar a causa da memoria histórica. O discurso de Young, pola contra, semella querer conter o potencial revolucionario da memoria.

O obstáculo principal a respecto da efectividade dos monumentos é o fetichismo. O fetichismo consiste en atribuír aos obxectos propiedades que non teñen; daquela no caso dos monumentos, os axentes da memoria tenden a pensar que axudan a manter viva a memoria pola simple razón de estaren colocados. A reflexión de Antón Figueroa bota luz sobre a cuestión:

Estamos nun país onde se “recollen” e “salvan” cantidade de fetiches, mentres a historia corre por outro lado. Parece que neste país todo o mundo está a escavar para logo gardar; continuamente estamos assistindo á presentación de alfaias de todo tipo que “de non ser polo esforzo de X, se perderían para sempre....” Nunha situación coma esta, iso é lóxico, e mesmo ás veces necesario. O máis grave de todo é que se

pense que iso é o mellor e o único que se pode e debe facer. Cando a escavación se converte na única posibilidade de cultura, o que en realidade se fai é enterra-las posibilidades que quedaban. (1988: 13)

Do mesmo xeito que un libro non lido é un libro inútil, pódese afirmar o mesmo verbo dos monumentos. Se estes non son visitados e interpretados, non valen para nada. O exalcalde da Coruña Francisco Vázquez deu un exemplo de fetichismo digno de traer a consideración. Cando lle perguntamos se ía sobrevivir o galego ou non, respondeu: «Sí, posiblemente. Yo soy bilingüe, yo hablo gallego y hablo castellano. Conozco el gallego y conozco el castellano. Tengo además una gran biblioteca en lengua gallega de cerca de mil volúmenes» (entrevista co autor).

A observación de Figueroa aplícase sen fisuras ao fenómeno dos monumentos, só que no canto de escavar trátase de levantar. O material conmemorativo non entra en nós, non lembra por nós. As persoas teñen que entrar nos monumentos para estes significaren algo. Só funcionan, daquela, se foren catalizadores de diálogo e debate.

É por isto que cando mellor poden funcionar os monumentos é antes de levantárense. Isto demostrouse co monumento de Valdi, localizado na Avenida de Navarra na cidade da Coruña. A causa da oposición creada polos sectores reaccionarios á memoria histórica, representados polo PSdeG e mais o PPdeG, e grazas á afouteza dos promotores

agrupados na CRMH, creouse un debate que atinxiu abondosa visibilidade mediática. Através da pugna dialéctica, espalláronse os valores republicanos e normalizouse, até certo punto, o debate público verbo da memoria histórica. Porén, unha vez acadado o dereito de erixir a obra, desapareceu ese debate e esa pugna<sup>7</sup>.

### **3. Praxe e utopía no monumento de Pepe Galán**

A praxe dun discurso teórico ou artístico realizaase cando se reúnen no discurso un concepto abstracto e unha idea concreta que xuntos xeran un mapa de acción que de ser implementado pode contribuír a socavar as estruturas de opresión. Na memoria histórica, o elemento abstracto é a historia e a memoria (como fenómenos xenéricos) encanto o concreto son os proxectos que representan e utilizan parcelas da historia e da memoria. De seren ben-sucedidos os proxectos, a súa praxe pode provocar na sociedade unha transformación cognitiva, unha praxe de pensamento.

Como ferramenta revolucionaria, a praxe naceu no pensamento marxista. Un representante desta liña teórica, Luis González, escribe que a praxe é «conocer la lógica estructural del modo de producción capitalista; criticar los efectos deshumanizadores de

7. Sobre este asunto, véxase Thompson 2014.

la misma y proponer –desde ese saber y esta crítica– un proyecto de sociedad en el que esa lógica fuese superada en sus raíces» (1991: 197). Trátase daquela de vencellar o coñecemento coa crítica da realidade (praxe de pensamento) e executar un plano de acción alicerzado nese coñecemento e posicionamento ético (praxe política). Para a praxe transformar a realidade é preciso que da contemplación se pase á acción (Adorno 1962: 23)<sup>8</sup>.

A estrutura base de calquera praxe e pensamento dialéctico é un binario conceptual<sup>9</sup>. No monumento de Galán hai tres binarios conceptuais que, artellados pola abstracción e a concreción, dan lugar á praxe do pensamento. O primeiro estabelécese entre o discurso escrito –a placa descriptiva– e o discurso artístico. O primeiro constitúe o elemento concreto na medida en que evoca un evento específico e empiricamente demostrado; o segundo é a representación abstracta dese feito<sup>10</sup>. A placa enmarca a interpretación da obra e constitúe o primeiro e indispensábel ingrediente para a funcionalidade da construcción:

**8.** Explicado este concepto noutras palabras, o teórico marxista Adolfo Sánchez Vázquez (militante socialista durante a guerra civil e exiliado en México) explica que a praxe é “el gozne en que se articula el marxismo en su triple dimensión de proyecto, crítica y conocimiento” (1985: 442).

**9.** Para Frederic Jameson o pensamento dialéctico consiste en inventar un espazo ou idea que transcende o Bo e o Mao que, sen esquecer esta diferenza, visa a comprensión das interrelacións entre os dous (1981: 234).

**10.** Distingo aquí a historia dun evento concreto e a historia como fenómeno xenérico e por tanto abstracto.

## MORTOS DO PORTIÑO

Lembranza das persoas que deron a vida pola nosa liberdade o 3 marzo de 1937. Simboliza o acontecido no intento de fuxida dun cento de persoas polo mar do Portiño, a causa da represión franquista.

MONUMENTO: corredor de aceiro, que vai de sudeste a noroeste, con escadas de fuxido ou de reencontro, que soben ou baixan do monte, van ou veñen do mar.

TEXTO: pano de nomes con dezaseis fusilados, dous afogados e un morto na cadea; signos cuñados no chan de metal, recheos de chumbo, como o aplicado nos seus pasamentos.

LUZ AZUL DOS FAROIS: elemento secuencial semellante ao latexo do corazón, querendo representar con isto un xeito de presenza continua.

*Camiñantes!*

*Ollade o ceo!*

*Ulde o mar!*

*Sentide o vento!*

*Non esquezades a quen morreu pola liberdade!*

Comisión pola Recuperación  
da Memoria Histórica da Coruña  
Concello da Coruña  
Ministerio da Presidencia

A Coruña 12 de Abril de 2008

A mensaxe é clara e a explicación permite ao visitante apreciar, aínda que de xeito restrinxido, o simbolismo (o discurso artístico), o cal abre a posibilidade de

imaxinar o evento representado. A placa tamén establece límites a respecto da interpretación. Para este tipo de obras, a estética debe estar sempre ao servizo da memoria evocada. A liberdade total de interpretación é para a arte desvencellada dos crimes contra a humanidade<sup>11</sup>.

Unha das eivas serias que amosan moitos dos monumentos é a falta da explicación do simbolismo intencionado. E cando existen placas, as explicacións son decote ambiguas ou insuficientes; por exemplo, o espiral de Acisclo Manzano en Santiago, cuxa placa reza «Vae Victis 1936». En non poucos casos as lendas deturpan os feitos como sucede co monumento en Ares, elaborado por Miguel Couto, que alude ás vítimas na comarca que foron deportadas a Mauthausen: «Aos nosos veciños en Mauthausen» lese. O resultado é a suxestión de que as vítimas ou ben emigraron a Mauthausen ou mesmo foron alí de ferias. Como intervencións éticas e socio-políticas, os monumentos teñen que se defender de calquera trivialización. A todo custo se debe evitar caer no relativismo e sobre todo na mentira como ocorre en Ares e noutros lugares<sup>12</sup>.

**11.** O único defecto que detectamos no texto da placa é a palabra “pasamentos”, que suxestiona que non houbo vítimas e vitimarios. As vítimas foron fusiladas e cómpre expresalo sen eufemismos.

**12.** A placa máis ignominiosa do Estado é con certeza a do cementerio de Badajoz que adxudica a culpa do masacre tanto aos fascistas como aos republicanos: “El pueblo de Badajoz a todos sus hijos que perdieron la vida en ella y que aquí reposan con el deseo de que nunca más en el suelo hispano sucedan hechos como los que hace 50 años comenzaron”

Os outros dous binarios da obra de Galán conforman o miolo da imaxinación utópica. En termos xerais, a Utopía consiste en ter esperanza na posibilidade de dar volta ao sistema. Segundo o fundador dos Estudos Utópicos, Ernst Bloch, pensar a Utopía é soñar esperto –conscientemente– ao contrario do soño freudiano no que domina o inconsciente. Para Bloch, o obxectivo dunha Utopía revolucionaria é forxar un novo vieiro desde o soño individual ao soño colectivo «que sae para moldear o mundo externo polo menos para alivialo, polo menos como *locus minoris resistantiae*, ou mesmo como a instrumentalización para [atinxir] o obxectivo» (2000: 237)<sup>13</sup>.

A Utopía que nos concirne é ollar ao futuro no sentido contrario ao que propón a narración que se xestou na Trasición («todos tivemos a culpa») e adoptou con tenaz dedicación o PSOE. O discurso dominante deste partido parte da premisa de que este autoengano resolverá todos os conflitos políticos actuais e vindeiros. A ollada ao futuro implica xa que logo a aniquilación da historia traumática. Para o movemento memorialista, en contrapartida, o futuro nútrese dese pasado que serve como elemento transformador da sociedade actual e futura. O mantra neoliberal da «fin da historia» implica que non hai xa outro sistema mellor que o capitalismo tardío e

**13.** Tradución miña do inglés, que é unha tradución do alemán orixinal. Esta obra referencial publicouse en 1923.

por tanto acabouse a necesidade de coñecer a historia como un acervo que constrúe as sociedades. Trátase dunha fe cega na evolución positiva da sociedade non moi diferente da que alimentou o ascenso ao poder dos nazis.

No pensamento utópico que propón a obra de Galán entran dous elementos; primeiro, o sobe-baixa das escadas. As que baixan cara ao mar simbolizan os fuxidos perseguidos e baleados; as que soben na dirección contraria son os recordos do masacre que retornan. Esta dialéctica xunta o evento –o masacre– co recordo del; e isto conduce á concienciación social que se acada grazas ao coñecemento do crime e ao entendemento das súas causas e consecuencias.

Por súa vez, os faros e mais os postes que os sustentan xeran outro binario menos evidente, xa que os dous compoñentes non se producen simultaneamente. E é que o monumento ten dúas vidas por así dicir: de noite os faros iluminan os nomes dos asasinados, o que converte o monumento de maneira exclusiva nun lugar de conmemoración. De día, en contraste, os nomes non son tan aparentes e os elementos que destacan son as escadas, o horizonte e o océano<sup>14</sup>.

De día pódese imaxinar o cruzamento do pasado e presente –a fuxida das vítimas e o retorno dos seus recordos– simbolizado polas escadas. Ao mesmo tempo, os postes crean unha xanela que mapea a

**14.** Hai que salientar a estética mesurada do monumento que non cae na estetización do trauma como acontece (opinamos) no monumento de Tomasz Lec en Varsovia, que representa a ponte que unía o gueto grande co gueto pequeno (véxanse fotos en “Warsaw Ghetto Bridge Memorial”).

mensaxe do monumento sobre o horizonte. Por esta razón, é preciso facer dúas visitas para entender e apreciar mellor a obra. O máis efectivo é comezar coa visita nocturna porque o evento tivo lugar na noite. Desde o monumento séntese a presenza próxima do mar e ao ver os nomes iluminados pódese facer unha idea do que alí aconteceu. O faro que chisca como o latexo do corazón aumenta a illusión da presenza das vítimas. O que impera nesta visita son daquela a conmemoración e a imaxinación en clave negativa.

A combinación de noite e día é a faceta do monumento que permite ir alén da praxe de pensamento e entrar no pensamento utópico. Pódense distinguir tres movementos: o primeiro é a baixada ao mar que acabou no masacre; o segundo é a volta da memoria que leva á concienciación social e o terceiro é voltar ao mar de día desde o pensamento e a ollada en clave positiva. É neste estado cando se soña esperto con ese mundo diferente do noso. Esta ollada semella ademais proxectar a memoria da fuxida frustrada ao resto do mundo, o que libera e universaliza os recordos e as visións democráticas das víctimas. O pensamento utópico é a consumación da praxe de pensamento e a fase previa á praxe política.

#### **4. O desafío**

Aínda que teoricamente se pode considerar o monumento de Pepe Galán un lugar de memoria, non

o é porque non é visitado, agás contadas excepcións. Para conseguir que unha construcción como a de Galán funcione, cómpre un grande esforzo que ten que vir principalmente das asociacións de memoria, dos institutos e das universidades. A política institucional pode tamén contribuír por medio de colaboracións puntuais.

É preciso expulsar a todo custo a concepción fetichista verbo dos monumentos. O fetichismo leva á mitoloxía (Adorno 1962: 16) e arruína a Utopía igual que a ansiedade afoga o sexo. Todos os monumentos sufren a mesma sorte, en maior ou menor grao, de abandono.

Unha opción para levar á práctica é converter a obra de Galán nun «lugar de conciencia».

Liz Sevcenko explica que os lugares de conciencia teñen principalmente tres obxectivos: «[I]nterpretar a historia através dun lugar, crear programas que estimulen o diálogo en torno ás cuestións sociais urxentes de hoxe e dar oportunidades para o envolvemento do público» (2011: 114)<sup>15</sup>.

O público máis importante é a mocidade. Sen a implicación dela, as tarefas actuais a prol da memoria histórica perden o seu potencial. Para os rapaces interesárense na memoria histórica hai que elaborar planos proactivos para integralos no movemento memorialista. É preciso dirlles poder e as ferramentas para eles dirixiren os seus propios proxectos e crearen o seu propio patrimonio

**15.** Tradución miña do inglés.

republicano. É fundamental que os rapaces deixen de ser receptores, como ocorre nas aulas, e pasen a ser actores<sup>16</sup>.

Se non se usan os monumentos como catalizadores de transformación política, son inúteis e contraproducentes. De símbolos da memoria deveñen en símbolos do esquecemento. Esta situación de desleixo pódese transformar nunha oportunidade para sensibilizar a sociedade, e sobre todo a xuventude, cara ao trauma causado polo fascismo. Se os rapaces non se implican, o país construirase sobre a mentira e a esquerda perderá as súas raíces. É agora ou nunca.

**16.** É preciso citar o cómic de Xosé Tomás, *Compañeiros: Homenaxe ás vítimas do Portiño* (publicado pola CRMH), que axudou a achegar o coñecemento do evento á mocidade.

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## The Escape from O Portiño

Eliseo Fernández

On the 3rd of March 1937, several dozen anti-Francoists staged an attempted escape by sea from the port of O Portiño.

They were waiting for two fishing boats to set out from the port of A Coruña. These boats were to be hijacked by members of "El Despertar Marítimo," the fishing union of the CNT. They were to be sailed to O Portiño with the aim of collecting people and to escape to France, Asturias or some other area still under the control of the Republic.

Little by little, people from across the city arrived in O Portiño but a group of six men got lost and went to the house of a local man. This man, thinking that he was being robbed, sounded the alarm which alerted a Civil Guard who lived nearby. This Civil Guard alerted the authorities to mobilise, thinking that the men were planning an attack on the military base on Monte de San Pedro.

The Civil Guard and the soldiers approached the area and started capturing people, who had little chance of escape. Many who were there tried to escape by sea. Many of them drowned whilst some escaped and the others were arrested.

Twenty-eight people were captured and tried by a war court. Some were accused of activities prior to the military coup but the majority were novices and were guilty of nothing more than wanting to escape to Republican held lands.

Fifteen of the prisoners were sentenced to death by the war court and were executed months later, in October 1937.

Two other men who took part in this escape attempt died later as a consequence: José Antonio Boedo Núñez was captured at a later time, arrested in a house where he was hiding. He was executed for being a Republican and a CNT militant. The other arrested man, Manuel Parga Suárez, died of sickness in prison in A Coruña without ever regaining his freedom.

## A Tribute of Light and Dignity to the Dead of O Portiño

Fernando Souto Suárez,  
A Coruña branch of the Association of Historical Memory

In 2007, we convened a competition of ideas and the response was so great that it made the final choice difficult to make.

Finally, after two rounds of voting, the working group which we had the honour of being part of, the selected work was that proposed by Galán.

The work on the monument was carried out by Galán and we are very grateful for all his hard work.

I remember a phone call from Pepe, from the MaximinoSeoane Metalworking workshop in A Coruña. He was already working on the sculpture after the technicians had adjusted the construction process to the millimetre.

The artist and his helpers filled the holes of the names, which had been cut into the metal, with molten lead. Over and over, they melted and poured kilos of the same material used to make the bullets which had killed so many free men and women.

When the workshop staff received news of the inauguration of the monument some were curious to see how the liquid lead would look in the names cut into the Corten steel. Others said that they didn't know anything about the events of O Portiño or asked questions about it. They kept a respectful silence then went off to start work.

In a way, those hard-working, highly-skilled professionals were participants in the appearance of this steel path and its commitment to vindicating the past for future generations.

.....

Since I was little, I have heard tell of the events that took place in that small fishing port in the outskirts of

A Coruña which we know as O Portiño. I was born into a fishing community, a neighbourhood of A Coruña where the people lived from the sea in the 1950s. Many of my neighbours were originally from Lourido, Peruleiro, Labañou, San Roque, from the area of O Portiño.

In my family they spoke of escapees who died, who were captured or who escaped from the trap that this place became. But these were not faceless, unknown people: they were members of my family, neighbours, the father of..., the brother of..., the husband of... We didn't know their names but we knew their families.

I didn't know why they were escaping or from what, or why they were chased, but I always got the feeling that they were good people.

They said that they hadn't done anything wrong but I felt that they must have done something. In time I learned that they wanted to change the world, to flip the omelette, as MariquiñaVillaverde put it.

When Antón Patiño touched us with his memoirs in "Memoria de ferro" [Memory of Iron], we made a commitment to honour the names, the places and the facts and thereby contribute to a better understanding of our own history.

We started by organising a talk in O Portiño itself so that the

researcher Dionisio Pereira, the seafaring poet Serafín Mourelle and the writer Manolo Rivas could tell us the facts.

On that day - the 23rd of February 2006 - those of us who answered the call decided to pool our resources to recovery this part of our history.

The monument is now a part of the landscape; we now hope that this book will help to improve our ability to understand our past, a story which is never ending.

### **The events of the past are continually present**

Pepe Galán, artist

A Coruña 21/10/2019. I write these lines a few days before the exhumation of the coup leader, Franco. Meanwhile those who were assassinated remain in their unmarked graves. ¿Hasta cándo durará iste gran entero? - Non chores que poden escoitarte" (When will this grand burial end? Don't cry as they can hear you.), wrote Luís Pimentel in his poem "Cunetas".

#### **Towards O Portiño:**

Like streams of water, dozens of people flowed to the spring at Santa Margarida with the aim of reorganising, they later branched out once more and flowed tragically to their end in the hills and saltwaters of O Portiño.

#### **The commitment:**

It is important to highlight the untiring work of the men and women in organisations for liberty such as the A Coruña branch of the Association of Historical Memory (CRMHAC). It is also worth highlighting the joint efforts at the time of the socialist government with the bipartisan government in A Coruña (PSOE and BNG), who were responsible for the construction of this monument.

For their commitment to Galicia and to freedom, many artists and intellectuals took up arms. I remember an amazing experience in 2006 which I took part in -

a guided walk around the death sites on Monte de Bens (close to O Portiño) led by Antón Patiño Regueira. At the first site, Patiño stood in front of a standing stone and told us that the teacher and artist Luís Huíci was shot there. Later, heading down towards Meicende, our guide pointed out precisely the ditch where the painter Francisco Miguel was killed. Some years ago, in the 2000s, if my memory is correct, a group of artists, poets and many others went to the cemetery of Bértoa in Carballo, A Coruña where it is thought that F. Miguel is buried in a mass grave.

This homage to O Portiño is also dedicated to them.

The evolution of artistic thinking, as in all disciplines, is permanent. In this sense, the artist is making a commitment - politically, socially and environmentally - with the works of art they create. Gone are the works of art for the propaganda of the powerful; now art can stand and contribute to the demands of the people.

#### **The Monument:**

When I was invited to submit a proposal for the tender to create a memorial sculpture, the first thing I did was to visit the site. I found it especially interesting that the hill was created from the rubbish of A Coruña and was to now become a public space with the capacity to be reborn as a place of community - almost a metaphor for the "elevation of dignity" on the detritus of our memory.

I studied the site in detail - its location and its orography - to ensure that the artwork was environmentally friendly and integrated into the landscape, on top of the formal and symbolic coherency of the piece itself.

With these fundamentals in mind, I designed a 20 m long by 2 m wide path made of Corten steel, running from southwest to northwest. The steps, going up or down the slope, heading towards or coming from the sea, symbolise escape and reunion.

There are nineteen names carved into the face of the metal and filled with lead, symbolizing the bullets they were assassinated with. Two lampposts shine a cobalt-blue light on the names to signify the beat of the heart. I wished to represent the continuous presence of the event.

Lastly, the orientation of the work and the surrounding landscape complement the path and bestow the sensation of freedom one feels when gazing out towards the horizon where Illa do Vandebal sails over the Atlantic Ocean.

#### **Pepe Galán / Biographic Summary**

Pepe Galán (A Coruña 1955). He started painting while experimenting with other supports such as screen printing, engraving, photography and video, media that are shared with his sculptural work.

Attend national and international fairs and exhibitions. Europe and America (USA) represent an important contact with the different artistic, historical and contemporary options.

Participant and co-founder respectively of La Galga and Gruporzán.

Representative of the generation that became known in the eighties, after beginning his plastic experimentation in the immediately preceding one.

Galán will create a work that goes through different stages: volume weaving, metal, translucent materials such as plastic and glass or audiovisual.

He is part of the Executive Commission of the Association of Artists AGAV, beginning a stage of commitment in defending of the cultural and social policy of the artists.

It is integrated into the Burla Negra Platform, carrying out cultural activism actions. Contributes to the creation of the *Arnotes art magazine*, internationally distributed. Co-founder of the multidisciplinary collective Radio Buguina.

He designs, among others, the AGAPI 1999 awards, for the Galician Association of Independent Producers, Honorary Institutional Sculpture of the CRMH AC, (...) Scholarship by the Art and Law Foundation.

He directs workshops and collaborates in courses: Mariñán, Deputation de A Coruña. MAC Museum of Contemporary Art. CEFORE Xunta de Galicia. IES Salvador de Madariaga, A Coruña. Museum of Fine Arts A Coruña. (...)

It carries out ephemeral installations in the city, as well as in natural spaces. Awarded in the ideas competition to make the monument to the victims of the Francoist

repression in O Portiño.

They give him the First Prize IX AS-PG SHORT FILM COMPETITION. 2019.

You receive different orders for public spaces such as sculptures and large murals, specially executed in corten steel ...

#### **Public work:**

*Iron and fabric in a curved line* 1990, Cerceda Health Center, San Cip 1994 Sculpture Park of Torre de Hércules da Coruña, *Roads of his* 1999 Santo Domingo Square in Lugo, *Rowing facing the wind* 2006

Neda Promenade Ferrol, our *Dead of the Portiño* 2008 O Portiño, A Coruña. Mayday 03, 2008, Finisterrae Aquarium, Scientific Museums of A Coruña (...)

#### **Individual expositions:**

Between 1984 and 2019 he made multiple personal exhibitions, part of them are the series: *Fabric and tension*, iron and fabric, *The locked up inside*, *Openings and anchors in the wind*, *Windbreak*, *Mayday*, *From yesterday to tomorrow* (retrospective), *Fire and iron*, burned production or *The return of an absence* (itinerant in Galicia).

In M1 fly box and sketches, + presentation of the short film, *The fertile combat*.

#### **Collective exhibitions:**

His work was shown in, Spain, Portugal, Italy and France.

## **Museums, Public and Private Collections:**

Selection; Carlos Maside Museum, Sada A Coruña. Foreign Bank of Spain Collection. Xunta de Galicia. Deputation A Coruña. Funds National Library Madrid. MAC Museum of Contemporary Art. Abanca Foundation. Scientific Museums of A Coruña, Fine Arts Museum of A Coruña, Friends of the Galician Museums, Ártabras doors, A Coruña.

### **Path to Infinity**

Xavier Seoane, writer

Pepe Galán's monument in O Portiño, neighbour to the city of A Coruña, is a memorial to the republicans of Coruña who tried to escape by sea but who were assassinated by government troops a few months after the coup d'état. It spontaneously awakens in the imagination the epitaphs, stelae and engraved tombstones from the depths of time. Despite the sentiment and great difference, it also evokes the memorial spirit present in the writings of the moving Palatine Anthology, that splendid collection of Greek poems and epigrams which bring to life numerous characters and stories from human history with dignity, ethics, humanity and gravitas. But in the case of the sculpture

in O Portiño, there's no room for literature or poetic language; the artist chose austere sobriety to the extent that the only words are the names of those nineteen anti-Francoist victims.

Pepe Galán, a strong believer in historic memory and a militant artist involved in ethical and social causes, understands that true understanding of the events of history is important for society and is a logical reparation for the victims and their descendants. For these reasons, he wanted to create an artistic monument to serve as not only a tribute but also as an evocative documentation of the tragic events that took place at the start of the Civil War. In that small, isolated port, nearly 100 anarchists tried to escape to freedom by sea, only to end up as a desolate and cruel tale of humanity - the tragic massacre of dozens of men whose only crimes were a belief in democracy, strong political convictions and their demand for social justice.

As this piece is a tribute to the victims, the sculptor adopted the strategy of hiding his involvement by making a discreet work of art with a minimalist concept and design. His humility in this aspect also respects the landscape, blending into the space and lay of the land in a

natural way: this green amphitheatre with vast ocean views that amaze with their majestic beauty and scale.

For this reason, he decided to work at ground level (a symbol of death, burial and perpetuity) and with the air (a symbol open to the resonance of hope, altitude and freedom, unfulfilled hopes and dreams).

The sobriety and harshness of the Corten steel used for the path, with its expressive texture and chestnut-red rust colour, intentionally contrasts with the rich, verdant green of the vegetation. Using lead to fill the engraved names of the victims on the flat surface is a reminder of the metal which riddled their bodies.

This piece, in essence, is conceived as a 20-metre-long path which ascends or descends at its two ends, leading towards a difficult, steep escape by land at one end and to an unreachable but longed for and eternally empty maritime horizon at the other.

Pepe Galán wished to create a solid testimony, a connection with the earth as well as a reminder of their journey. A path which, like the petroglyphs carved into the rocks along our coast, has the names / symbols of the protagonists carved into it. One day, the earth will cover them but, like a metal petroglyph,

it will foreverbear witness to history, to a tragedy, to lives cut short.

Rhetoric is absent in the work of Pepe Galán. With its nakedness, its radical simplicity, it allows us to travel: sit on the steps, walk along the path and the surrounding lawns, or lean against the posts supporting the lights. These lights truly attain the symbolic reference desired by the author, who acts as a Dan Flavin of the night, creating an optical and immaterial sculptural effect which expresses emotions and creates spatial transfiguration. Firstly, because he gave the lights a subtle blue tone, auratic and celestial, which expands the sculpture into its surroundings and which sets up a poetic contrast with the long night of stone\* – *Longa noite de pedra* – in the no-less symbolic darkness. Secondly, by ensuring that one of the lights flickers slightly, he has created a certain sense of fragility, of time, a heartbeat, a breath...

But this rigorous and contained approach also leaves room for rich symbolism. The steps and the path are symbols of transit, of movement and of escape. The two lampposts

\* *Longa noite de pedra* (*Long Night of Stone*) is a book of poetry by Galician writer Celso Emilio Ferreiro, the result of the author's imprisonment in Celanova Monastery during the Spanish Civil War.

create a kind of doorway which frames the horizon, a symbol of freedom- The lead is a testimony to bullets and destructive violence. The choice of Corten steel and the constructive layout evoke the industrial culture from which some of the victims came. This material has long played an important role in Pepe Galán's sculptural works.

With the exception of the light - which symbolises tenuousness, fragility and vulnerability (and maybe also the subtle heartbeat of life and hope) – the choice of materials is based on their durability: to guarantee the survival of this memorial against erosion and the ravages of time and climate. The sense of space, of emptiness – so strongly felt in the work and the setting – represents absence and death and establishes a sense of vulnerability, loss and solitude.

This piece, like others by the same author, is made with discretion and sobriety; conceived as a place for remembrance, solitude and meditation. A type of gateway to the infinite or an arc of impossible hope.

I remember visiting the memorial in a range of weathers, lighting conditions and moods. One of the last visits, on a rainy night, I was accompanied by the writer Méndez Ferrín. The heavy, slanting rain, the gusting, strong winds and the dark,

shadowy skies contributed to a scene of adversity, an atmosphere in keeping with the expressive silence of this piece. The artwork evokes the attempted escape and disappearance - shot or locked away - of those anti-Francoist republicans from Coruña who suffered the brutal reprisals of individuals with lead in their hearts and steel in their souls.

#### **The praxis of historical memory: the monument of Pepe Galán**

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Languages & Literatures

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**English translation** Craig Patterson

Erected from the end of the twentieth century, monuments symbolizing fascist crimes perform a problematic function in the process of recovering historical memory. The majority of them were abandoned once inaugurated and, rather than symbols of memory, are now memories of what has been forgotten. The material markers of memory are complex and it is more likely that they work against rather than in favour of memory. One exception is the work of Pepe Galán, located in the small valley that leads down to the cove of O Portiño, near the city of A Coruña. The monument

alludes to the massacre of a group of left-wing activists who attempted to flee from O Portiño to Asturias, which still lay in the Republic zone.

Made of steel, its colour somewhere between red and orange due to rust, the monument is a twenty-metre long and two-metre wide walkway, facing the sea. It has steps at either end: some descend towards the sea and others ascend in the opposite direction. In the middle of the memorial the names of the murdered fugitives appear in lead, and above these, two floodlights emitting blueish light, supported on seven-metre tall aluminium posts. At dusk, the floodlights are activated and one of them flickers at five-second intervals.

Erected in 2008, this monument has never been analysed in spite of possessing the potential to advance the cause of historical memory<sup>1</sup>. Places that are symbolized can be an incentive for a community to maintain its memory: they are tangible heritage and resist the passage of time, above all if they are located where the events occurred. These are referred to,

1. Amaya Caunedo provides a brief summary of the characteristics of the monument and the event it represents, but it is a descriptive rather than analytical text (2013: 79-80).

in Galician and in Spanish, as “sites of repression” and their strength lies in their testimonial value as regards the crimes. Material markers constructed after the events (in this case, in the post-Franco era), tend to possess a less evocative power, if their purpose is not to confer authenticity upon the events but to interpret them.

I recall Pepe Galán's construction as the first of which I became aware when I decided to undertake a study on commemorative monuments in Galicia. Night was falling, it was drizzling and the lamps that created a blue aura had an impact upon me. I wanted to get closer to examine it in greater detail, but the drizzle turned into rain and I therefore had to postpone my visit for another occasion.

## **1. The thwarted escape and the recovery of its memory**

It was also raining on the night of the massacre, on 3<sup>rd</sup> March, 1937. The anarchist trade union, “El Despertar Marítimo” [“The Maritime Awakening”] organised an escape for approximately one hundred people who were being persecuted by the recently established Fascist regime. The fugitives were waiting in boats so that, when the signal was given, they could transfer to the two fishing

vessels that were supposedly waiting further out to sea (Pereira 2009: 130, Fernández 2009a: 164). Their objective was to reach Asturias, which had still not fallen to Franco's rebels. However, the escape did not take place because the Civil Guard discovered the plan. They opened fire on the fugitives, who escaped by "scrambling up the hill between rocks and gorse", or along the coast, "either by swimming or by some small boat at the ready" (Pereira 2010: 410). Antón Patiño, in an eyewitness account of the event, states: "The men tried to escape the shots by swimming or climbing up over the boulders and rocks. Some were taken prisoner; some were wounded and others were washed up on the beaches and by the cliffs days later" (2005: 72). Twenty-seven were arrested, fifteen shot, one died in prison and at least three drowned. Of those murdered, three of the victims were less than twenty-one years old (Lamela 1998: 119, Fernández 2009b: 190-191, Pereira 2009: 130 and 2010: 410).

This event was practically unknown until 2005. The memory existed in a ghostly manner, as attested to by the reflection of Fernando Souto. As a native of the fishermen's quarter near Portiño,

he writes that the event was spoken of in his family, but without how and why it occurred being explained, and without the names of the fugitives being specified: "I didn't know why there fugitives, what they were running from, why they were being pursued, but I did have the impression that they were good people" (2009: 5).

The driving force behind the recovery of the Portiño memory was Antón Patiño. In 1996, his initiative was discussed in an article by Xosé Luís Méndez Ferrín which was published in *Faro de Vigo* newspaper (Souto 2005). In 2005, Patiño published his book of witness accounts, *Memoria de Ferro* [Memory of Iron], and contacted the Coruña Commission for the Recovery of Historical Memory (CRMH). It was through the launches of the book organized by that group that the decision to create the monument was taken (Monge 2008, Ventureira 2007). The Commission organised an ideas competition and proposed several projects. This was the only case of such competitions, quite common in Germany as regards the creation of markers related to the Holocaust, occurring in Galicia. The advantage of such competitions is that they open up the process of monumentalisation to citizens. If a social debate then ensues,

the process permeates the public sphere even further.

The history of Portiño in the post-Franco period also has bearing on this analysis. In 1977, Coruña City Council decided to turn the place into a landfill. It would be impossible to find a more apt metaphor for the concealment of historical memory. In the same period in which the followers of the dictatorship would wantonly destroy compromising documents, covering a valley with 200,000 tons of waste was a brilliant initiative to do away with a place symbolised by trauma, although the symbolism at that time was fragmentary and disconnected. “It was a smelly place”, recounted Galán, “like the ENCE factory in Pontevedra; it depended on which way the wind blew, and the smell drifted towards A Coruña” (interview with the author). Owing to the enormous saturation, in September 1996, the landfill collapsed and carried away cars, boats and killed a man whose body was never found. According to Galán, the collapse “was like a volcano without lava” (interview)<sup>2</sup>.

This transformation of trauma into refuse recalls, although in the opposite sense, the renovation of San Simón Island which, from 1998 to 2005, turned the greatest symbol of fascist crimes in Galicia into a

tropical fantasy presided over by Jesús Pérez Varela, César Portela and Captain Nemo. In this case, instead of refuse, it was beauty and exoticism that performed the same function of burying memories that might threaten the system<sup>3</sup>.

Notwithstanding, these types of concealment should be differentiated into two kinds: those that are reversible (to a greater or lesser extent) and the destruction of sites of memory that are irreversible. The most damaging in Spain was

2. This interpretation of the refuse like a burying of the trauma cannot be proven empirically, given that written documents or oral testimony is required to verify this. However, this observation should not be disregarded because the initiative to create the landfill was taken when there were still abundant direct witness accounts of the event. Such recollections irritated the political class, a passionate defender of the forgetfulness championed by the constitutional monarchy. Neither should the possibility that the decision to send refuse to Portiño was influenced by the unconscious collective conditioned by the narrative of later Francoism, which promoted the suppression of events and memory, be disregarded. This hypothesis coheres with the decisions taken during the transition to democracy and the politics of disremembering (still in existence today) adopted by the Spanish Socialist Workers' Party (PSOE).

3. On this destruction of memory, see Thompson 2017.

the demolition of the bullring in Badajoz, undoubtedly the greatest symbol of Francoist extermination, conceived and executed

by Juan Carlos Rodríguez Ibarra.

The recovery of Portiño was a landmark for Galicia's historical memory movement. At the inauguration, there were events with figures from the left who helped to promote awareness of that traumatic episode from history. For family members and relatives of victims who attended this public commemoration of their loved ones, the monument represented a strengthening of pride and spirit. However, a serious lack prevailing in practically all projects and acts of the memory movement throughout the Spanish state should be recognised: the conspicuous absence of young people. This reality is a clear sign that historical memory, if immediate and radical measures are not taken, may die in the fourth and undoubtedly fifth generation<sup>4</sup>.

## **2. Fetishism and the loss of memory**

In 1957, Robert Musil 1957 initiated a critical line regarding the phenomenon of monuments. His observations are devastating: "There is nothing in this world as invisible as a monument (...). They are impregnated with something that

repels attention (...). One cannot say we did not notice them; one would have to say they 'de-notice' us, they elude our perceptive faculties: this is a downright vandalism-inciting quality of theirs" (1957: 61-62).

Although correct, this discourse is deterministic; it does not open the door to other forms of creating and using monuments.

james Young, an eminent figure in this field, is also distrustful of monuments; for example: "Memory without consequences contains the seeds of its own destruction" (1994: 15). His analyses on aesthetic constructions that represent the events and victims of the Holocaust are equally (and even more) applicable to Galician monuments and others in the Spanish state.

4. The first generation (which has almost disappeared by the time of writing this article [2019]) are the people who lived through the Civil War and are old enough to remember the period. The second generation, between eighty and eight-five years old, was born at the end of the conflict or at the beginning of the dictatorship. The third generation was born either at the end of the dictatorship or the beginning of the post-Franco period. The fourth generation are the great-grandchildren of direct witnesses of the war and the first members of the fifth have just been born or are about to be. See Valverde 2014: 69-79, who explains the characteristics of the different generations.

What distinguishes Young from Musil is that he defends a generally favourable position, in spite of his suspicions, concerning monuments. I defend a non-deterministic position, but one that is not so positive. My research on this matter has led me to distrust symbolic constructions. Whereas for Young, a monument is effective if it succeeds in attracting attention from passers-by, for me, it is only effective if it plays a transforming role and is used to advance the cause of historical memory. Young's discourse, however, seems to wish to contain the revolutionary potential of memory.

The principle obstacle concerning the effectiveness of monuments is fetishism. Fetishism consists in attributing to objects properties they do not possess; in the case of material markers, therefore, the agents of historical memory tend to think that they help to keep memory alive by simply being there. Antón Figueroa's reflection sheds light on this matter:

We are in a country where a large number of fetishes are "collected" and "saved", whilst history goes in another direction. It seems that in this country, everyone is excavating to keep what they find; we are continually attending the presentation of all kinds of jewels that "if not for the efforts of X, would

be lost forever..." In a situation like this, that is logical, and at times necessary. The worst thing of all is that it is thought that this is the best and only thing that can and should be done. When excavation becomes the only possibility for culture, what it actually does is to bury the remaining possibilities. (1988: 13)

In the same way that a book not read is a useless book, the same can be said of monuments. If they are not visited and interpreted, they are worthless. The former mayor of A Coruña, Francisco Vázquez, provided an example of fetishism worthy of consideration. When I asked him if the Galician language was going to survive or not, he replied: "Yes, possibly. I am bilingual. I speak Galician and Castilian. I know Galician and I know Castilian. Furthermore, I have a large library in Galician, with around a thousand volumes"

(interview with the author).

Figueroa's observation can be applied unreservedly to the phenomenon of monuments, where rather than excavating, it is a matter of erecting. The commemorative material does not enter us, does not remember for us. People have to enter monuments for them to signify something. They only work, therefore, if they are catalysts for dialogue and debate.

This is why monuments can function best before they are erected, as was demonstrated with Valdi's monument, located on Avenida de Navarra in A Coruña. Due to the opposition created by sectors reactionary to historical memory, represented by the PSG (the Galician branch of the PSOE) and the PPG (the Galician branch of the PP), and owing to the determination of the promoters within the CRMH, a debate ensued which attracted considerable visibility in the media. Through this dialectic contest, Republican values were promoted and, to some extent, the public debate about historical memory was normalized. However, once the right to erect the work was obtained, the debate and contest vanished<sup>5</sup>.

### **3. Praxis and utopia in the monument by Pepe Galán**

The praxis of a theoretical or artistic discourse occurs when an abstract concept and a specific idea, which together generate a map of action and when implemented can contribute to the collapse of oppressive structures, combine in a discourse. In historical memory, the abstract element is

5. Regarding this matter, see Thompson 2014.

history and memory (as generic phenomena), while the concrete element is the projects that represent and utilize segments of history and memory. If projects are successful, their praxis can bring about in society a cognitive transformation: a praxis of thought.

As a revolutionary tool, praxis was born in Marxist thought. A representative of this line of theory, Luis González, writes that praxis is "to know the structural logic of the capitalist mode of production; criticise the dehumanizing effects of it and propose - from that knowledge and criticism - a project for a society in which that logic was overcome at its source" (1991: 197). It is about linking knowledge with the critique of reality (praxis of thought) and executing an action plan based on that knowledge and ethical positioning (political praxis). For praxis to transform reality, contemplation must lead to action (Adorno 1962: 23)<sup>6</sup>.

The basic structure of any praxis and dialectical thought

6. Explaining this concept in other words, the Marxist theoretician Adolfo Sánchez Vázquez (a socialist militant during the Civil War and exiled in Mexico) explains that praxis is "the hinge on which Marxism is articulated in its three-dimensional project, criticism and knowledge" (1985: 442).

is a conceptual binary<sup>7</sup>. With Galán's monument, there are three conceptual binaries that, articulated by abstraction and specificity, give rise to the praxis of thought. The first is established between the written discourse - the descriptive plaque - and the artistic discourse. The first constitutes the specific element insofar as it evokes a specific and empirically demonstrated event; the second is the abstract representation of that fact<sup>8</sup>. The plaque frames the interpretation of the work and constitutes the first and indispensable ingredient for the functionality of the construction:

#### THE DEAD OF PORTIÑO

A memorial to the people who gave their lives for our freedom on March 3, 1937. It symbolizes what happened when one hundred people attempted to escape Franco's repression by sea from Portiño.

MONUMENT: a steel walkway, running from southeast to northwest, with steps for an escape or reunion, going

7. For Frederic Jameson, dialectic thought consists in inventing a space or idea that transcends Good and Evil and which, without forgetting this difference, aims at understanding the interrelationships between the two (1981: 234).

8. I distinguish here the history of a specific event and history as a generic and therefore abstract phenomenon.

up to or coming down from the hill, going to or coming from the sea.

TEXT: the floor of the walkway with the names of the sixteen people shot, two drowned and one who died in prison; signs stamped upon the metal floor, filled with lead as a reminder of their passing.

BLUE LIGHT FROM THE LAMPS: a sequential feature similar to a heartbeat, intending to represent a continual presence.

*Travellers!  
Watch the sky!  
Smell the sea!  
Feel the wind!  
Do not forget who died for freedom!*

The Coruña Commission  
for the Recovery of Historical Memory  
Coruña City Council  
President's Office

A Coruña, April 12, 2008

The message is clear and the explanation enables the visitor to appreciate, albeit in a restricted manner, the symbolism (the artistic text), which opens up the possibility of imagining the event represented. The plaque also establishes the limits concerning interpretation. For this type of work, the aesthetic must always be at the service of the memory evoked. Absolute freedom of

9. The only defect I can detect in the plaque's text is the word "passing", which suggests that there were no victims or victimizers. The victims were shot and this should be expressed without euphemisms.

interpretation is for art disconnected from crimes against humanity<sup>9</sup>.

One of the serious defects present in many monuments is the lack of explanation of the intended symbolism. When plaques exist, their explanations are often ambiguous or insufficient; for example, the spiral by Acisclo Manzano in Santiago, whose plaque reads "Vae Victis 1936". In more than a few cases, the legends distort the facts, as is the case with the monument in Ares, created by Miguel Couto, which alludes to the victims from the area who were deported to Mauthausen: "Our neighbours in Mauthausen", it reads. The result is the suggestion that the victims either emigrated to Mauthausen or even went there on holiday. As ethical and socio-political interventions, monuments have to defend themselves from any trivialization. One should avoid at all costs falling into relativism and especially lying, as occurs in Ares and other places<sup>10</sup>.

10. The most ignominious plaque in the Spanish state is undoubtedly that of Badajoz cemetery, which attributes blame for the massacre to both fascists and republicans: "The people of Badajoz to all their children who lost their lives and who rest here with the wish that events like those that began 50 years ago never occur again on Spanish soil".should be expressed without euphemisms.

The other two binaries of Galán's work form the core of utopian imagination. In general terms, Utopia is about having the hope of turning the system around. According to the founder of Utopian studies, Ernst Bloch, to think of Utopia is to daydream - consciously - as opposed to the Freudian dream in which the unconscious prevails. For Bloch, the objective of a revolutionary Utopia is to forge a new pathway from the individual dream to the collective dream, "that goes out to shape the external world at least to alleviate it, at least as locus minoris resistentiae or even as the instrumentation for the goal" (2000: 237)<sup>11</sup>.

The Utopia which concerns us is a gaze towards the future in the opposite sense to that proposed by the narrative created during the Spanish Transition to Democracy ("we were all guilty") and adopted with tenacious dedication by the PSOE. The dominant discourse of this party starts from the premise that this self-deception will solve all current and future political conflicts. Looking to the future therefore implies the annihilation

11. My translation from the text in English, which is a translation from the German source.  
This key work was published in 1923.

of traumatic history. For the memorialist movement, in contrast, the future emerges from that past which acts as a transformative feature of the society of the present and future. The neoliberal mantra of the “end of history” implies that there is no other system better than late capitalism, and therefore there is no longer the need to know history as a form of heritage from which societies can be constructed. It is blind faith in the positive evolution of society not much different from that which fuelled the rise to power of the Nazis.

Two elements enter the utopian idea proposed by Galán. Firstly, the going up and down the steps. The steps that go down to the sea symbolize the people who were persecuted and shot; those going up in the opposite direction are the memories of the massacre that return. This dialectic links the event - the massacre - with the memory of it; and this leads to the social awareness that is achieved through knowledge of the crime and the understanding of its causes and consequences.

In turn, the headlights and the posts that support them generate another less obvious binary, as the two components do not occur simultaneously. The monument therefore has two lives so to speak:

at night the headlights illuminate the names of those killed, which renders the monument an exclusive place of commemoration. By day, in contrast, the names are not so apparent and the features that stand out are the steps, the horizon and the ocean<sup>12</sup>.

By day, one can imagine the meeting of the past and present - the flight of the victims and the return of their memories - symbolized by the steps. At the same time, the posts create a window that maps the message of the monument on the horizon. For this reason, it is necessary to visit the site twice in order to better understand and appreciate the work. The most effective way is to start with a nocturnal visit, given that the event took place at night. From the monument, the presence of the sea is felt and by seeing the illuminated names, one can get an idea of what happened there. The beacon that blinks like the heartbeat increases the illusion of the presence of the victims. What prevails in this visit

12. The measured aesthetics of the monument, which does not fall into the aestheticization of trauma, must be highlighted in contrast to (in my opinion) the monument by Tomasz Lec in Varsovia, which represents the bridge unifying the large ghetto with the small ghetto (see photos at “Warsaw Ghetto Bridge Memorial”).

are therefore the commemoration and the imagination in a negative sense.

The combination of night and day is the facet of the monument that enables us to go beyond praxis of thought and enter into utopian thought. Three movements can be distinguished: the first is the descent to the sea which culminated in the massacre; the second is the return of memory that leads to social awareness and the third is to return to the sea by day through reflection and the gaze in a positive sense. It is in this state when that world different from ours is the subject of daydream. That gaze also seems to project the memory of the thwarted escape onto the rest of the world, which liberates and universalizes the democratic memories and visions of the victims. Utopian thinking is the consummation of the reflective praxis and the phase before political praxis.

#### **4. The challenge**

Although Pepe Galán's monument can be regarded theoretically as a place of memory, it is not because it is not visited (except on rare occasions). In order for a construction like Galán's to work, a great effort is required, which

has to come mainly from memory associations, high schools and universities. Institutional policy can also contribute through occasional collaborations.

The fetishist conception of monuments must be expelled at all costs. Fetishism leads to mythology (Adorno 1962: 16) and ruins Utopia in the same manner that anxiety hampers sex. All monuments suffer the same fate, to a greater or lesser degree, of abandonment.

One option to put into practise is to convert Galán's work into a "site of consciousness". Liz Sevcenko explains that sites of consciousness have three principle objectives: "To interpret history though a site; to engage in programs that stimulate dialogue on pressing social issues today; and to share opportunities for public involvement in those issues" (2011: 114)<sup>13</sup>.

The most important audience is young people. Without their involvement, current historical memory projects lose their potential. In order for young people to take an interest in historical memory, pro-active plans to involve them in the memorialist movement must be developed. They need to be given the power and tools to carry out their own projects and create their own

13. My translation from English.

Republican heritage. It is crucial that young people cease to be receivers, as in the classroom, and become actors<sup>14</sup>.

Unless monuments are used as catalysts for political transformation, they are useless and counterproductive. Symbols of memory become symbols of forgetfulness. This situation of neglect can be transformed into an opportunity to raise awareness among society, and especially youth, of the trauma caused by fascism. If young people do not get involved, the country will be built on lies and the left will lose its roots. It is now or never.

14. Reference must be made to the comic by Xosé Tomás, Compañeiros: Homenaxe ás vítimas do Portiño [Comrades: a Tribute to the Victims of Portiño] (published by CRMH), which contributed to raising awareness amongst young people about the event.

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