

Madrid, Madrid, Madrid: About the Challenges and Possibilities of Madrid as a Location for Design

On the 14th of May, *Madrid, Madrid, Madrid: About the Challenges and Possibilities of Madrid as a Location for Design* was held in designtransfer at the prestigious Berlin University of the Arts.

The event was included in the programme of the designtransfer, the gallery and transfer point of the College of Architecture, Media and Design of the UdK Berlin, which, for some years now, has promoted the dissemination of design in Berlin through the organization of lectures, round tables and workshops, in which such outstanding international professionals as Enzo Mari, Julia Lohmann, El Último Grito, Giulio Cappellini, Curro Claret, Marloes Ten Bhömer, Manuel Estrada and Piero Lissoni, among others, have participated.

The long and productive collaboration between the IED Madrid and Ilka Shaumberg, in charge of exhibitions and events at designtransfer, has culminated, this year, in the carrying out of a joint activity. Ana Domínguez Siemens, a writer and journalist, specialized in design, architecture, interior design, fashion, art and antiques, curated a meeting with the publisher, Paloma Cañizares, and the designers, Andrea Caruso (Ciszak-Dalmas) and Álvaro Catalán de Ocón, under the heading *Madrid, Madrid, Madrid: About the Challenges and Possibilities of Madrid as a Location for Design*.

Ana Domínguez introduced the subjects of the meeting, focusing on a setting like Madrid, where interesting things are happening, despite it being a city with no industry or tradition in a field like design. What it means to produce in Madrid (Paloma Cañizares), what it means to design in Madrid, being from another country (Andrea Caruso) or what it means to activate from Madrid, ideas and processes that are carried out in other parts of the world (Álvaro Catalán de Ocón), were the main topics at this conference/meeting.

WHAT IT MEANS TO PRODUCE IN MADRID

Paloma Cañizares, architect and founder of PCM Design, has taken her experience as a small publisher to Berlin. For some years she has worked with young designers from all over the world, including Thomas Krall, Mischer'Traxler, Michal Fargo and Normal Studio, and with each of them she has established a dialogue in order to be able to carry out the production of projects, looking for their usability, functions and the expressive force of the proposals. Together they have found who will make the objects, often restructuring techniques and processes, as was the case of the collaboration with La Real Fábrica de Vidrios y Cristales de La Granja de San Ildefonso, in which old chandelier moulds were recovered in order to adapt them to the creation of carved vases and glasses.

The collaboration of Paloma Cañizares with designers happened by chance (she herself points out that design today has no set place or border), although, up to now, she has not collaborated with Spanish designers. In her speech Paloma emphasized the difficulty in Madrid of finding the supplier, the factory or the artisan who understands and is disposed to take risks and experiment, often with material and processes that do not form part of his routine and mean that he has to innovate. What remains is testimony to the effort and determination needed to carry out something that the local market does not recognise either. Owing to the crisis and lack of sensitivity, those who buy from

PCM are neither from Madrid or Spanish: France, Germany and England are the countries where their creations are most widespread.

WHAT IT MEANS TO DESIGN IN MADRID, BEING FROM ANOTHER COUNTRY

Andrea Caruso is one of the co-founders of Ciszac-Dalmas, a studio he founded seven years ago, together with Alberto Gobino. Both designers trained at the Politécnico of Turin and the IED Madrid, where they attended the first edition of the Master of European Design Labs.

Andrea focused his presentation on telling his story, that of a new designer who decided to settle in Madrid because he saw the opportunity for increased research on the *objet trouvé*, through the creation of *La Clínica Design*. This project sought to reflect on the objects that are abandoned on the street, and how to adapt them in order to create a readymade through the exchange of synergies between a designer and an artisan, an experience that can lead to interesting functional and formal experiments.

An apparently adverse setting, such as Madrid, where professionals in the sector are scarce, becomes an opportunity: because of the closeness, because of the need to find ways out of a stifling crisis and to try new paths in the face of the lack of ideas and resignation of a stagnant situation. Thus was born the *Comodino*, *Sgabello* and *Tavolino Lungo* series. This was the beginning of experimentation which made the work of Ciszac-Dalmas known to large companies like Max&Co, which commissioned them to create the setting of their new stores. And from there, emerged experiences in the world of fashion, of corporate image and strategy; all united by the interest and control of communication, the digital media and social networks with their ability to connect with diverse realities and worlds. IOU Project represents their most complete project: around an object a story is told, in which the designer needs to have great inventiveness and must know how to help to sell an experience beyond the product itself.

WHAT IT MEANS TO ACTIVATE IDEAS AND PROCESSES IN MADRID, THAT ARE MADE IN OTHER PARTS OF THE WORLD

In his speech, Álvaro Catalán de Ocón, a designer from Madrid who was recently awarded the CODESPA 2013 prize, continued to tie the conceptual work and the project of the designer to self-production, in which the production processes are controlled by means of direct contact with products, packaging and communication.

Right from his first projects (*Cornucopia*, *La Flaca* and *Candil*), Álvaro revealed to the German public his obsession with “carving up” every element of his lamps, seeking aesthetic and material simplicity, simple assembly. Catalán de Ocón uses almost all the existing elements and the creation of the few pieces of basic technology, made with great technical knowledge by local artisans.

Once again he goes to a productive sphere, which lends its know-how to the designer who wants to carry out a creative collaboration: the solutions found are always the result of dialectic between he who thinks and he who executes. Such closeness to the object is also due to the sensitivity of the designer, constantly questioning its use: how will the person interact with his lamps when he turns them on and off, a gesture, which being automatic, becomes a responsible and surprisingly poetic act. The wish to

sensitize the user through simple acts when using things is also the wish to take care of communication, the story that is there behind the object. In this respect, the case of the Pet Lamp is emblematic, because it arises from the wish to provide a solution to an ecological and social problem that threatens and cripples the Colombian jungle region. To this end, the re-utilisation of waste products has been carried out. In PET, the soft drink bottles which fill the rivers throughout the world have been used, with the involvement of artisans who have been displaced from their homes by the guerrilla. With simple instructions reminiscent of basket making techniques which are well known to these people, the artisans produce articles of great simplicity and beauty. Here, the designer partially enters the process, leaving the artisan a margin of freedom and randomness. His role is of a more strategic nature and is limited to thinking about how to activate an economy, how to make a design experience into the opportunity for many artisans to recuperate their craft and their wellbeing, and how to tell the story of each of them, giving value to the people and their condition and environment.

CONCLUSIONS OF THE LECTURES

After the three speeches, and moderated by Ana Domínguez Siemens, a debate broke out between the speakers and those attending the event, a heterogeneous audience made up of students and teachers of the UdK Berlin, designers and professionals, both Berliners and Spaniards resident in Berlin.

In the first place, it was emphasized how difficult it is to do design in Madrid. This initial theory, developed by the testimonies of the three speakers, although with some nuances, had one clear point in common: that of converting adverse conditions into an opportunity. If the city lacks an industrial fabric specialized in design, then self-production is almost an obligatory path, a necessity, but it is also the best way to control the whole process, from the idea to production, communication, etc.

Madrid is also a favourable setting, because it allows you to move in a market which is not saturated, where freedom exists to choose producers who seek that alliance with a designer which can help them to find a solution to a crisis which continues to affect the industrial reality of the whole of Spain. And on such a heterodox and not very linear production and distribution chain, the object in itself is not sufficient to be able to achieve a place in such competitive markets: you have to inform the future user, in a pro-active and participative way, of the story that is there behind things, you have to construct a discourse around the project. In this respect, Paloma, Andrea and Álvaro gave clear examples of how inventiveness supports and drives a trade which is changing.

Part of the audience pointed out that Berlin's reality was similar, but that the difference lies in the existence of greater dialogue between professionals and more enthusiasm on the part of everyone to go forward. In Spain, however, individualism and little willingness to share was pointed out. Probably, from there derives the lack of success of professional associations, which, as well as receiving little support from public investment, also have few members: DiMad, in Madrid, has been active for less than ten years, which is nothing compared to the FAD of Barcelona, founded in 1903.

THE ROLE OF EDUCATION. THE ROLE OF THE IED MADRID

The role of education and of the centres for the dissemination of the culture of design was emphasized in the debate. The IED Madrid opened its doors twenty years ago,

when, in Madrid, there was just one fashion course at the Universidad Politécnica. It was in this context that the first designers in the city were trained. The school has always had the ability to catalyse projects and bring together professionals, right from its formation until the constant updating and debate on what is currently happening in the world of design today, creating occasions to take this debate beyond the classrooms.

The school is also responsible for the activation of economies in local productions: student projects that are produced on the Network of Artisans, who habitually collaborate with the school and who, subsequently continue to collaborate with the new professionals, accompanying them in their first steps and productions.

Likewise, thanks to the institutional relationships created, the school has become the guarantor of the dissemination of the culture of design, it has engaged in a dialogue with politicians and administrations so that they incorporate design as a value in management strategies, in promoting related creative industries, in supporting collectives.

We believe that dialogue between designers is a key element and, in this respect, in the neutral territory of the school, debates are devised that build connections between protagonists of the sector, alliances are established, knowledge and experience is shared. For that reason, the IED Madrid and designtransfer, UdK Berlin have aligned in order to catalyse and promote meetings between professionals, to generate reflection and transmit the culture of design. This has been the case of designtransfer, but it is also possible to do it in a more regular way through the media and networks of the education centres.

The Berlin experience has served to open a window onto the interesting realities of Spanish design, specifically that of Madrid, which, far from representing a local reality becomes a paradigm for a way of thinking, producing and spreading creation. And not just that of Spain, for it aligns with all those realities with little industrial production substratum, but also with the trends that are marking today's designers with aspects like self-production and self-publishing, and the small publishers which allow the creative process to be experienced up close and follow the steps of the stories that they want to tell.

Dario Assante
Director of the IED Master