

THE BIRD PERCHED ON THE HILL

On the TITSA building in Tenerife by NTRES arquitectos

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As though it were part of the hill itself whose stones had risen, with an outline that follows the contours of the very earth, with the same grey colour and the same force, the building for the guaguas or buses of Tenerife, the new TITSA building on the slope of the mountain of La Esperanza, presents itself as a work of splendid architecture.

A well-placed initial excavation on the site enables this great building to adapt almost chameleonically to the land. This hollow accommodates large bays laid out according to an orthogonal grid which, upon engaging with the front of the site, folds to adapt to the contours. To the rear, the building almost merges at the high point of the podium with the street that bounds it, practically disappearing.

The whole comes together in a powerful structure of reinforced concrete, with a clearly laid-out floor plan and a section that draws out singular forms with its panel-like beams. This structure is of such calibre that, once erected, the space is perfectly defined. Once again, rather than being solely a mechanism for the transmission of loads, the structure is fundamentally a device for the transmission of the order of space: gravity constructing space.

The architects then communicate the various spaces in an intelligent operation of interconnection, opening into the next, creating a porous building and filling it with light. We might say that it is an operation characteristic of the baroque, in the same spirit in which they are about to complete the new Tenerife North airport at Los Rodeos. And here, as there, they have designed a central space that is open to the sky, that is crossed intelligently by the bare structure of the roof beams, as though seeking to underline its importance. The light that inundates this interior-exterior - magnificent - is like the rhythm of time. In order to make this space visible, they practise a large opening overlooking the sea, thereby producing an operation that is recognisable from the exterior. The perfect decision: light constructing time.

You might say that it is like a great beast that has lain down on the mountainside, overlooking the sea, in silence, as though slumbering. Then atop it, like beauty and the beast, the architects place a smaller, lighter piece in contrast with the plinth, like a head looking out to sea. Constructed with a more delicate metal structure and facing, and with perfect finishes, this office piece is replete with judicious solutions in a thousand details of good architecture. But the most judicious of all is the principal idea of placing a head overlooking the Atlantic Ocean and constructing it with extreme delicacy to contrast with the powerful podium. The tectonic on the stereotomic. Like a bird perched on the hill.

Now, in Rome, I am thinking how to finish off this text about the Canarian architects. And here, at the Baths of Caracalla, on this luminous grey evening on a Saturday in June, as the sun is going down, the gulls of Rome cry out in chorus at the hour at which birds retire, with a sound that makes a chillingly beautiful music. And faced with these imperial phantasms, I think of the building in Tenerife as one of those birds perched on the firm

traces of the almost Roman structures with which our architects have crowned the hill that protects the mountain of El Taco. With the universality of profound beauty.