

UNA ARCHITETTURA COME ME

On the architecture of Ignacio Vicens and José Antonio Ramos

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Sobre la arquitectura de Ignacio Vicens y José Antonio Ramos

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If the architecture of Ignacio Vicens and José Antonio Ramos had to be condensed into a single term, I would not hesitate to describe it as cultured. The vast culture that they possess as people, as architects and as teachers, permeates all their architecture. A profoundly cultured architecture.

In one of his last books, Saramago creates an accurate image to express how much of the creation of an artist who works with his hands is in them. And he says that we have "like little brains in our fingertips", wanting to express how much we owe not only to the necessary creative thought but also to the hands that execute those sublime orders. In the case of architects this is evident. A brilliant idea must be matched by a constructive, manual development, capable of putting that idea into practice with maximum power. At the fingertips of Ignacio Vicens, there are not only small brains. They are small brains full of an enormous culture.

His first published work, a small white house in Almeria, was not only a brilliant exercise in architecture that some called minimalist, but basically a wise reading of the typologies that history offered him in that ancient Roman land: a courtyard house.

Then came the house of Las Matas, which was for many years his resistant residence. A splendid house, this time full of color and strong textures that takes over the landscape extending its arms in all directions. The house does not cease to remain in our memory.

La casa de las Encinas is his most awarded work. The strong incisions of the direct cuts in the quarry make the stone vibrate as if combed by light and shadow. And more than the reference to Moretti in his house on the Autostrada del Sole, it suggests to me better, a rustic bugnato originating in the everlasting admiration of Ignacio Vicens for Giulio Romano.

Of the major works, are they major works because of their greater dimension, I would like to highlight three, two built and a third, epiphanic, about to be built.

The Church of Villalba, sober and restrained, cleverly plays the game of scales to make the building, quiet, have a strong presence. The architects know well how to treat the small size of the building to make it appear larger.

The Faculty of Social Sciences of the University of Navarra, its best known public building, is a beautiful exercise in light. The forcefulness of the very closed exterior volume contrasts with and highlights the architectural promenade provoked inside by the light. It is a work of high spatial tension. Very beautiful.

And I believe that the Three Cultures Auditorium in Madrid, a project on which they have been working for a long time, will mark a certain epiphany of our architects. In such a

well-considered work, with such powerful dimensions, everything they think about architecture is condensed and expressed to perfection.

Bernini's shadow comes to my mind over them. I cannot fail to mention here his well-known passion for Bernini, which constantly comes to his lips when he speaks of architecture to his students and friends. I am sure that if Ignacio Vicens had accompanied Bernini on his "trip to Paris to see about building the Louvre", Louis XIV would not have failed to commission him. Nor would Mansart, the brother of the king's pharmacist, have done anything so aseptic. Nor would Paris, and the world with it, have failed to put up that wonderful undulating façade. And Chantelou would have made a very different chronicle of the facts.

Bernini's shadow over this great work by Ignacio Vicens and José Antonio Ramos, baroque in the deepest and most positive sense of the term, can be read as a close translation of his thoughts on architecture. The countless and precious sketches and drawings and models are a promising prelude. The three large halls that like open hands rise expressively to the sky, not only in their form, are a reflection of contemporaneity, but also of the architects themselves. They seem to be their own open hands. Which also speak of their proven generosity.

And with the same records we could talk about the impressive papal stages, or the building of the Plaza de España in Madrid, or so many other things.

And I would not want to finish without mentioning something about the figure of Ignacio Vicens as one of the most prestigious professors of projects at the Escuela T.S. de Arquitectura de Madrid. He has been teaching for more than 30 years and enjoys great popularity among his students, whom he enthuses with his enthusiastic verb. His classes are a lesson in how pedagogically he passes from History to Projects with the greatest naturalness, always through the sieve of his overflowing culture, of his "fondness for wisdom", as J.A. Cebrián would say. His students are proud of him. Carlos Ferrater, a privileged witness, writes that Ignacio Vicens' classes are "exciting architectural encounters". I can vouch for this.

When John Hejduck wrote a paradigmatic article on the wonderful Malaparte House in Capri by architect Adalberto Libera, he titled it with a very meaningful "A house comes to me". He wanted to express the identification of the architect with his work. This is how I would like to interpret all the work and all the teaching work of Ignacio Vicens and José Antonio Ramos. With an expressive: "Una architettura come me", with which I dare to head this text.