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**Ernst H. Gombrich's Contribution to the *Revista EGA*.**

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I

On the occasion of the silver jubilee of the journal *EGA Expresión Gráfica Arquitectónica* curiosity moved me to re-read its first issue with an eye to jotting down these brief reminiscences. My attention was drawn to the elegance of its style, the list of the participating scholars, and the academic quality of the articles, whose content is still relevant to this day.

As a demonstration of the eager hopes and ambitious targets with which publication of the journal began, it is worth noting that it included texts by almost all those then holding Chairs in this subject: Manuel Baquero, Julio Vidaurre, Javier Seguí, José María Gentil, Juan Antonio Sánchez Gallego, Miguel García Lisón, Alfonso Jiménez and this writer. Alongside these, there were pieces from a number of academics destined for brilliant careers, some of whom were sooner or later to be elevated to Chairs, such as José Antonio Ruiz de la Rosa, Antonio Millán, Ángela García Codoñer, Antonio Almagro, Pablo Navarro and Eduardo Carazo.

A list like this is striking in the first issue of a journal that had yet to make a place for itself and with a future that was far from certain. More striking still is the fact that it had contributions by two scholars from outside Spain: Diego Maestri, who was Professor of Disegno at *Università Roma Tre*, and Ernst H. Gombrich, art historian and former director of the Warburg Institute.

II

At that time Sir E. H. Gombrich (1909 to 2001) was widely recognized in academic circles in Spain, especially Departments of Art History. He was seen as the most important historian of the day, the last representative of the Central European School of art historians<sup>1</sup>. All this was consolidated by the translation and publication of several of his works in the *Alianza Forma* collection (five volumes of essays published between 1982 and 1987, as well as his popular *The Story of Art*)<sup>2</sup>. In fact, in January 1992 he was awarded a Doctorate *Honoris Causa* by the *Universidad Complutense* of Madrid, the Professor of Art History Antonio Bonet Correa being his proposer.

Some years previously his publications had come to the attention of the Gustavo Gili publishing house, who translated and issued, in their *GG Arte* collection of hardbacks with a yellow dust jacket, what I consider to be his major contributions to the academic world of architecture. These were: *Art and Illusion* (1960; G. Gili 1979), *The Sense of Order* (1979; G. Gili 1980) and *Ideals & Idols* (1979; G. Gili 1981). This wise action on the part of G. Gili publishers can be fully understood only if it is remembered that they benefited from the advice of Ignasi de Solà-Morales, the Professor of Theory of Architecture at the Barcelona School of Architecture.

Despite this publishing effort by G. Gili, Gombrich's writings had not drawn the amount of attention they merited from scholars in this academic field.

As I see it, this implies a certain lack of due focus, in view of the fact that *Art and Illusion* is the book that best explains the relationships existing between perception and graphical representation. It was the culminating point in a long series of pieces of research in this area, which had been undertaken over the whole of the twentieth century, starting with the earliest reflexions on this topic by Alois Riegl and other members of the so-called Vienna School of art historians.

I feel that I was the lucky beneficiary of this possible oversight. In the competitive examinations to be awarded a tenured lecturing post (held in the University of Valladolid in December 1985), and then the Chair (in June 1990), I was able to apply many of Gombrich's ideas on pictorial representation to the field of graphical expression of architecture. This constituted a contribution to theoretical approaches, the results of which are to be found in my book *Representación y Análisis Formal* (Valladolid 1992) and in many other writings.

### III

In view of this background, Ángela García Codoñer encouraged me to request from Gombrich a text appropriate for our new journal. Hence, I wrote to him in December 1991 saying that the departments of architectural representation in Spanish universities had the intention of publishing a new journal on this topic. So, I asked him for permission to include in this first issue an article of his that had not been incorporated in any of the volumes of essays hitherto published in England.

Moreover, I specifically suggested the piece entitled *Art History and Psychology in Vienna 50 Years Ago*. This paper had its origins in his contribution to the *Internationaler Kongress für Kunstgeschichte* held in Vienna in August 1983. I explained that two reasons motivated this choice. Firstly, the paper dealt with the studies of psychology and representation undertaken at the University of Vienna, which fitted in well with the editorial line of a future university journal given over to research. Secondly, it was a relatively short text. He answered by return of post declaring his agreement with the choice I had made.

On the occasion of the conferment of his honorary Doctorate in Madrid on 28 January 1992, it was possible for a number of university professors in Architecture Graphic Expression from Valladolid and Pamplona to greet him, some going on to spend the afternoon with him. With a somewhat ironic tone he stated that I had apparently chosen the text of his lecture for the *EGA* journal because the text was not too long. Wryly, he declared that he knew he wrote very long papers, but with a touch of sarcasm he claimed that nowadays the only thing that interested journals was for articles to be short.

Reverting to seriousness, he commented to me that he had been pleased that I had picked the text, as his publishers, *Phaidon Press*, had not selected it for inclusion in his latest book of essays, *Topics of Our Time* (1991), even though he believed it was an interesting contribution<sup>3</sup>. It is true that several years later he did manage to get it included in another volume of essays, this time published in Italian under the title *Dal mio tempo*<sup>4</sup>.

The first issue of the journal was due to be published in March 1993. At the beginning of April I wrote to Gombrich enclosing two copies of this first number with his article *Art History and Psychology in Vienna 50 Years Ago*. This

was preceded by a short presentational text of my own by way of an introduction to his ideas<sup>5</sup>.

#### IV

In 2001, I once again wrote to Gombrich with the aim of including one or another of his unpublished papers in our journal. I suggested that it might be the text of one of the various lectures that he had been sending me (this time without making any reference to the length of his writings). By that time, Gombrich had reached the age of 92, which made him more or less the last witness, and the living memory, of the history of twentieth-century culture, besides being rated in England as one of the humanists of greatest intellectual standing.

In the meanwhile, seven further books of his had been brought out in Spanish, with the previous items being republished by the Debate publishing house, which had taken over from G. Gili and the defunct Alianza Editorial<sup>6</sup>. All these circumstances made it appropriate to have another contribution from him, as this would give prestige to our journal. This had gone through six issues already, thanks to the backing of Ángela García and the department in Valencia.

A few months later, I received a letter from his son, Richard Gombrich, Professor of Sanskrit at the University of Oxford, to tell me that his father had passed away at the beginning of November. Over the following weeks and months, obituaries were published in art journals all round the world. It seemed suitable for our journal without delay to join in this recognition of his passing. Thus, we decided to start issue 7, for 2002, with my article *En recuerdo de Sir Ernst Gombrich (1909-2001)*<sup>7</sup>. This gave an overview of his intellectual itinerary and was followed by Gombrich's article entitled *Four Theories of Artistic Expression*, that I translated into Spanish a few years earlier<sup>8</sup>.

The original version of this article had appeared in 1980 in *Architectural Association Quarterly* (Volume 12, Number 4, pp. 14-19). It was a reworking of a lecture that Gombrich had given in Japan in April of that year. By reason of its topic, it was well suited to a journal dedicated to graphical expression, and indeed for any student of the history of architecture. This was made plain by the fact it had been included in the journal of the Architectural Association School of Architecture of London.

The act of publishing an extensive commentary on Gombrich, together with his article had unexpected consequences for our journal, as was recounted to me recently by Professor Ernest Redondo. It so happened that in the Barcelona School of Architecture a board had been set up to undertake a preliminary classification of the academic quality of journals of architecture and urbanism, with an eye to assessments for research bonuses. The chair of the board was the Professor of Architectural Design, Josep Muntañola Thornberg, a highly cultured man of recognized merit as a theoretician of architecture and a specialist in interdisciplinary topics running from semiotics to anthropology, and very definitely award of Gombrich's works.

Well, when the moment for quality assessment of the *EGA* journal arrived, on opening the latest issue to appear, Muntañola found the articles mentioned and was pleasantly surprised to see that our journal was the first in Spain to provide an extensive study of the work of Gombrich, so shortly after his death.

This was indeed the case, as there had been obituaries in the principal daily newspapers<sup>9</sup>, but it would be some time yet before even a few texts given over to a presentation of his ideas and his work would appear<sup>10</sup>.

Needless to say, the board in question gave our journal a good ranking within the architecture and urbanism group. This was the beginning of the growing process of inclusion in citation registers and international recognition it has enjoyed.

## V

As the intention is for the twenty-fifth anniversary special issue of the journal to include new contributions by those who wrote articles in its first number, the editorial board suggested that I should include an unpublished text by Ernst Gombrich.

I chose and translated the speech he made when he was awarded a Doctorate *Honoris Causa* at the Complutensian University, in which he presents the history of art as an antidote to the rise of nationalisms. Apart from this speech, Gombrich gave two further lectures in Madrid. One was at a seminar in the Department of Modern Art, at that time headed by Valeriano Bozal, and the other was in the auditorium of the Faculty of Geography and History, packed to the rafters with staff and students, and was entitled *The Magic of the Eye*. It is surprising that the *Universidad Complutense* did not publish any of these three texts, and that its archives hold no photograph of the events.

Gombrich sent me the texts in written form in case I wished to translate them. This I did with his paper given to the seminar, published in 2003 in *RA. Revista de Arquitectura*<sup>11</sup>. With the publication of this speech, the sole piece remaining unpublished would be *The Magic of the Eye*, an interesting historical analysis of the representation of the human eye in painting.

For better understanding of the context for Gombrich's speech, it should be recalled that those years had seen the division of Czechoslovakia in two, and after bloody warfare the Republic of Yugoslavia had disintegrated into six tiny states, while at the same time the states of the former Soviet Union had been breaking away and becoming independent. This was the reason for his warnings about the dangers of the growth of nationalism, the doleful consequences of which he had suffered in his youth.

A further interesting fact is that Gombrich believed he ought to deliver his entire speech in Latin, and actually composed it thus. He had received details of the ceremony in advance, with its text in Latin, and he felt that in a solemn affair such as this, especially as the doctorate was being awarded in the Faculty of Geography and History, it would be the custom to use Latin. He was rather disappointed to be told that Latin was reserved exclusively for the ceremonial part of the event.

This is why he began his speech (and his text) in Latin. Had he not done so, the first few paragraphs would not make sense. In them, he recalls how Latin was the language used for communication by the scientists and humanists of the whole of Europe from the sixteenth century onwards, in what came to be known as the Republic of Letters (*respublica literaria*). Latin would thus be an antidote against nationalism, something favouring a brotherhood among intellectuals, as

made clear by its use in solemn ceremonial in universities as far away from one another as those of Vienna, Oxford or the Complutensian.

His speech thus acquired its rhythm and progression. Latin as the common language of the West; ceramics as an example; the universal language of art; architectural styles that know no frontiers; the survival of the Classical heritage in mediaeval sculpture; the rapid diffusion of perspective and the technique of painting in oils throughout Europe; mutual influences among the great masters of painting; the search for one's own identity in contrast to fashions.

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<sup>1</sup> This was the statement made by the Professor of Art History of the University of Saragossa at the Congress organized in memory of Gombrich as an intellectual figure. Cfr.: Gonzalo M. Borrás Gualis: "Fortuna crítica de Ernst H. Gombrich en la historiografía española de arte", en *E.H. Gombrich. In memoriam*, Eunsa, Pamplona 2003, pp. 47-67.

<sup>2</sup> *Norm and Form* (1967; Alianza 1984), *Symbolic Images* (1972; Alianza 1983), *The Heritage of Apelles* (1976; Alianza 1982), *New Light on Old Masters* (1986; Alianza 1987), *The Image and the Eye* (1982; Alianza 1987), *The Story of Art* (1950; Alianza 1979). At a later date it would publish: *Aby Warburg* (1970; Alianza 1992). It has not been translated *On the History of Art: Views and Reviews* (1987). Others minor works published in England and elsewhere have not been translated.

<sup>3</sup> *Topics of our Time: Twentieth-Century Issues in Learning and in Art*, Phaidon, London 1991.

<sup>4</sup> *Dal mio tempo. Città, maestri, incontri*, Einaudi, Torino 1999, pp. 63-72.

<sup>5</sup> "El concepto de representación en la obra de E.H. Gombrich", *EGA Expresión Gráfica Arquitectónica*, 1, 1993, pp. 36-37; pp. 38-41.

<sup>6</sup> *Tributes* (1984; Fondo Cultura Económica 1991), *A Lifelong Interest* (1991; Debate 1992), *The Essential Gombrich* (1996; Debate 1997), *Topics of our Time* (1991; Debate 1997), *Meditations on a Hobby-Horse* (1951; Debate 1998), *A Little History of the World* (2005; Península, 1999). At a later date it would publish: *The Uses of Images* (1999; Debate 2003), *The Preference for the Primitive* (2002; Debate 2003).

<sup>7</sup> *EGA Expresión Gráfica Arquitectónica*, 7, 2002, pp. 5-10.

<sup>8</sup> *EGA Expresión Gráfica Arquitectónica*, 7, 2002, pp. 11-18.

<sup>9</sup> For example, the obituaries of Michael Podro in *El Mundo*, Juan Manuel Bonet in *ABC*, José Andrés Rojo in *El País*.

<sup>10</sup> In fact, very few pieces of work have been given over by art historians to Gombrich, as noted by Gonzalo Borrás in the article quoted previously, and as can be seen by using Dialnet. It is possible that others have desisted from undertaking studies of his works partly because of my own writings on Gombrich, partly and above all, by the exhaustive thesis by Joaquín Lorda, which I was fortunate enough to suggest and to supervise, examined in 1989 at the School of Architecture in Navarre, and published in 1991 with a preface by Gombrich himself.

<sup>11</sup> "Sobre la interpretación de la obra de arte: el qué, el porqué y el cómo", in *RA. Revista de Arquitectura*, 5, 2003, pp. 13-20.