

Greco and the Adventure of the Real

Alberto Greco symbolises the impact of art in life in the sixties. Painting initially in a style reminiscent of Art Informel in his native Argentina, Greco travelled across Europe before arriving in Spain. His questioning of the limits between art and life and his defence of the essential attitude of the artist as regards the importance of the work imply a radical change in the dominant artistic discourses in Spain at the time.



Greco is a work by Greco. This sentence could summarise the artist's leitmotif, which was the identification between art and life that made it impossible to separate his personal trajectory from his professional career. Alberto Greco (Buenos Aires, 1931 – Barcelona, 1965) seems to have identified himself as a living work of art, radically breaking with the traditional concept of art and taking his vital commitment to its ultimate consequences signalling his own death by writing the word 'end' in chalk.

Transgressive, provocative and exhibitionist are some of the adjectives intrinsically attached to the personage Greco that seem to reveal an identity constructed around conflict, like that of a modern hero as suggested by Baudelaire. The conflict was in fact extended towards institutions, the bourgeoisie, rules and norms, areas that Greco combated in his art and in his life. This is why including his oeuvre in the narrative context of twentieth-century art implies a recognition of his role, often diluted and even ignored by the same institutionalised discourses in the art scene of the late fifties and early sixties. His nomadic nonconformist spirit made him seek out the European avant-garde in Paris, where the first symptoms of a dramatic effect designed to displace the artistic trends of the fifties. Rooted in the pictorial tradition of the early avant-garde movements they were gradually replaced by the emergence of the work of art conceived as a process, recovering Duchamp's legacy. Greco played an active part in the changes that led to an attempt to transcend artistic space as a language and vehicle of representation, experimenting with new expressive media that posed the issue of the disappearance of painting and took works to the limits of their physical reality, thus anticipating the idea of the dematerialisation of the art work.

In his first displays of 'Live Art' Greco took objects, animals and people from real life, thereby automatically transforming them into works of art. This appropriation of objective reality with phenomenal intentions was realised through the 'Greco' signature that in itself guaranteed artistic quality. In this way art's physical universe was extended by the artist to embrace the very limits of reality in the creation of *live art*: art and life were coincidental concepts.

Self-proclaiming himself the 'founder of Vivo-Divo,' Greco published the *Manifiesto Dito del arte Vivo* (1962). More than a set of aesthetic rules the manifesto was posed as an affirmation of his artistic position, where the main underlying idea was summed up by Greco: 'Vivo' (living/alive) from *vivencia* (experience) and 'Dito' from *dedo* (digit/finger), the action of pointing out, showing. The manifesto itself read:

'Living art is the adventure of the real. The artist will not teach us to see with his picture but with his finger. He will teach us to see again what is happening on the streets. Living art seeks objects, but leaves found objects where they are; he doesn't transform or improve them, he doesn't put them in art galleries. Living art is contemplation and direct communication. He wants to do away with the premeditation implied by galleries and exhibitions. We should come into direct contact with the living elements in our reality: movement, time, people, conversations, smells, rumours, places and situations. Arte Vivo. Movimiento Dito. Alberto Greco. 24 July 1962. Time: 11.30 a.m.'

When he arrived in Spain in the early sixties he signed 'Vivo-Dito' art situations. A circle traced in chalk was enough to establish something that, being pointed out in

its usual context, appears endowed with an unexpected value: a ride on the underground, a covered wagon or a passer by can become works by Greco. The filling of real space in the search for a new context for artistic experience is ahead of later proposals that affirm that true art does not last. This appropriation of the commonplace through actions and situations implied a clearly provocative element that challenged Spain's artistic, social and institutional structures at the time. Few artists dared go so far, immersed as they were in a context characterised by the Franco regime's assimilation of the abstract avant-garde explored by groups such as El Paso. Once the years of autocracy were over, Spanish art had become (or had been transformed into) a letter of introduction of the dictatorship abroad, designed to improve its projection in search of international support. In this context, Greco's personality and oeuvre were a salutary lesson to artists such as Manolo Millares (1926-1972) and Antonio Saura (1930-1998), with whom he struck up personal and professional relationships. Painting a picture with Saura and creating a work out of old armchairs with Millares, were actions that enabled him to explore the more performative and interdisciplinary aspects of art from a critical and 'mean' standpoint that paved the way for contemporary Spanish art.

At the same time as he was transcending the limits of artistic space with 'Vivo-Dito,' Greco was actually subverting it, inverting the process by introducing living characters into his canvases through silhouetting. Whereas before he had pointed out what could, in the context of the real, become a work of art through his own choice, now it was reality itself that was materialised in artistic space, the borders of which were increasingly blurred.

However, it was in Piedralaves, a village in the province of Ávila, where Greco discovered interesting 'human material' he would use to create one of his most distinctive pieces. The photographs capture the way in which the artist drew attention to the architecture, the streets, the inhabitants, the very life of the village, by means of posters bearing his signature in order to grant them meaning as works of art. In all likelihood, the 'experiencers' of such an artistic encounter were unaware of its transcendence.

In Piedralaves Greco made *Gran manifiesto-rollo Arte Vivo-Dito* (1963). Considered a key work-testament, it reveals the decisive role played by writing in his oeuvre, writing as pictorial graphics, not for aesthetic purposes but as an expression of subjectivity. Drawings, photographs, collages, graffiti and text unfold along the metres of paper that make up the work, with no separation between action and writing. The combination reproduces the art-life equation that is also present in the notebooks, drawings and collages of Greco's last works, where he juxtaposes social and political criticism with an exhibitionistic representation of sexuality and personal propaganda through the use of his own identity and name: GRECO.

Bibliography

Enguita Mayo, Nuria. "La 'aventura de lo real' en la obra de Alberto Greco". En *¿La guerra ha terminado? Arte en un mundo dividido (1945-1968)*. AA.VV., Madrid: Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía, 2010.

Rivas, Francisco [comis.]. *Alberto Greco*. IVAM Centro Julio González, Valencia. Madrid: Fundación Cultural Mapfre Vida, 1991.

Links

www.albertogreco.com