

María **Bleda** (Castellón, 1969) and José María **Rosa** (Albacete, 1970) have worked together under the name **BLEDA Y ROSA** since the beginning of their artistic career. Both studied at the School of Art and Design in Valencia (Spain), the city in which they currently live. They started creating art together in 1992, the year to which correspond the first images of their series *Campos de fútbol* (Football Pitches). This initial project, in which they already present some of the conceptual and formal features that will define their career, was followed barely two years later by the first photographs of their second work *Campos de batalla* (Battlefields). By the mid-nineties, with these two series almost entirely completed, they had managed to outline a frame of reference that defines and singularises their creative project: an approach to landscape whose principal lines consist in perception of the sediments of memory contained in the geographical territory, the reproduction of traces deposited by the weight of history, and the construction of atmospheres characterised by their capacity to bring out latent elements in the setting. The essential tool in all their projects from this first stage and right up to the present day is the series. A conceptual and stylistic structure that grants unity and interrelates the different images that make up each of their productions. In the case of Bleda y Rosa however, this tool not only functions as a constructive work code but also acts as a prior spatial-temporal framework that begins to trace the map of their observation.

With their third project, *Ciudades* (Cities), initiated towards the end of 1997, they extend this play on reminiscences and suggestion in two directions that will be fundamental throughout their career: firstly, directing their attention towards the complex intertwining of cultures that make up the territory, and secondly, broadening the reading that they had been making of the memory of places by means of the simultaneous inclusion of architectural spaces. Following this work, territory and architecture, landscape and construction appear as two closely-related and balanced elements in their creative practice.

Origen (Origin) is their fourth major series, and probably the most complex of all those they have carried out to date. It was started in 2003 and still remains open. Over the ten years of career that elapse between their initial *Football Pitches* series and *Origen*, a progressive expansion can be noted in the framework of investigation and observation in which Bleda y Rosa situate their work: from the personal, almost biographical memory situated in times not long past which predominates in *Football Pitches*, up to arrival at the vast map drawn by *Origen* - the theory of man's evolution through the chain of archaeological discoveries that trace his development. Between them, a reading of a national dimension that addresses Spain through its *Battlefields*. And yet another reading, that of *Cities*, also set in Spain, in this case however referring to the historical cultures present on the peninsula, but due to the very geographical origin of those cultures it is an interpretation that will decant progressively towards a reading of the Mediterranean as a common historical reference. *Origen* not only represents a certain culmination of this process of extending the map and expanding places of memory, but also leads the reading of landscape understood as the coexistence of temporal strata and historical deposits of different looks to its most complex expression.

During development of their *Cities* and *Origen* projects, Bleda y Rosa carried out several works of lesser magnitude, but no lesser importance within their artistic evolution. These projects, often photographic commissions, have acted as a veritable laboratory for the opening of new perspectives and lines of work. In this sense, their approach to spaces like those represented by such historic locations as La Alhambra and Medina Azahara, the cities of Berlin and Tarragona, and the corporate headquarters of the multinational *Telefónica* has contributed to the structuring and sedimentation of the concept of a new, comprehensive body of work entitled *Arquitecturas* (Architectures), whose content includes various creation processes, all of them open: *Estancias*, *Tipologías*, *Memoriales* and *Corporaciones* (Rooms, Typologies, Memorials and Corporations). A wide-ranging, complex investigation into architectural spaces supported on a network of cross-references between the four series, from the traces of the historical process and repositories of memory to reflection on the functionality of buildings, types of use and their identifying features.

Thus, throughout a career constructed and established on well-founded series, Bleda y Rosa have brought to the fore a reflection on the nature of landscape and architecture outstanding in which is their attention to the latent and symbolic elements that come into play, as much in their configuration as in their perception.

CAMPOS DE FÚTBOL (Football Pitches)

The *Football Pitches* series, initiated in 1992, is Bleda y Rosa's first work. Though it could be said that when they conceived the piece and began working on it they were still immersed in a process of academic training, the work not only shows the beginnings of a significant coherence and cohesion, but also offers a preview of some of the working methods that will characterise them in the future. This project gathers together a series of photographs of football pitches, but approached as spaces of daily routine, spaces for play and possibly low-level competition, spaces open to appropriation, empty spaces, abandoned and in disuse, peripheral and occasionally indeterminate spaces whose purpose is shaped by the very use that is made of them. In addressing these spaces, Bleda y Rosa not only speak to us of the condition and nature of the place through its location in the landscape, they also employ an iconographic reduction, a tendency towards fragmentation which will characterise them from this moment on: the football pitch is represented through one of its two essential elements, the goal. In this way they establish two parameters that define the series: the nature and condition of the playing field, but also and above all, that object of almost sculptural qualities represented by the rectangle that forms the goal. An element which can sometimes also be reduced to a simple referential idea defined only by its use: a few lines or projections on a wall can also constitute a goal.

By essentialising the football pitch in this element, the register of each goal acquires the condition of an individual portrait, a quality accentuated by forgoing the frontal frame, which would be more typological, in favour of a side view which leaves open the omniscient presence of a spectator who could be either the onlooker of a non-existent game or an imaginary player. This implicit presence or reminiscence of the game, in the way these places are photographed, inaugurates the artists' interest in bringing time and space together in the construction of their landscapes. The deposit of accumulated memory in these spaces, the experience of the setting and our own memories thus enter into play in the reading of these images.

Bleda y Rosa's explicit intention with this project was to "reflect upon the passage of time in relation to the geographical space and to bring about discussion on a type of place rather than a particular place in question". And to do this they take a route that is close to them, both from the geographical point of view as well as from that of their personal memory. Many of these pitches are similar to those which the artists themselves experienced, so the remembering, the memory and the passing of time to which they allude have a dimension which affects both the objective condition of the places as well as the temporary experience that can be built upon them. The principal element that characterises Bleda y Rosa is present here now, in a decisive fashion: the conceptualisation of the landscape as an act of memory. A consideration which inevitably summons up a territory which is as much imaginary as it is material.

CAMPOS DE BATALLA (Battlefields)

In a certain way *Battlefields* is a key series in the photographic oeuvre of Bleda y Rosa, not only for its contribution to the final establishment of a good deal of their formal and conceptual approaches, but also for having been the work which contributed most in its day to the discovery and dissemination of their work. Initiated in 1994 and developed almost in its entirety over the two following years, the battlefields present a well-defined series of characteristics. In contrast to the black and white of the football pitches they introduce the use of colour which the artists would from now continue to use in their following series; the photographs are also taken employing a panoramic format (to which they will return later on in the *Origin* series), but dividing the shot into two visual fragments; and an element which, for them, is even more definitive, they incorporate text in their work in the shape of a legend. As already occurred in *Football Pitches*, the formal unity of the entire series is perfectly clear, but leaving sufficient freedom for each image to have its own autonomy. While in *Football Pitches* these formal elements were the appearance of the goal, an unvarying cloudy atmosphere and a slightly elevated viewpoint inclined towards the ground, in the *Battlefields* such references are of both a stylistic and a programmatic order. The first of these is the use of the historical reference, History as a subject. An element which, as from now, will always be present in each of their projects and which at this time does nothing but reinforce and define with greater clarity what in their first work was merely suggested: landscape as an act of memory. The second is a reference to the painting of battles, to the picture of history as much through the use of the panoramic shot as by the inclusion of a legend that establishes the event and the historical time to which the image refers. A third element would be the fragmentation of the panorama into two windows, with the aim of heightening tension between the documentary register of photography and reference to a fact which is recorded in the work but not directly represented. The line of the horizon, a fundamental formal and scenic component in Bleda y Rosa's work (which they announce and reformulate time and again in their works), is converted in these fields not only into a line of spatial continuity between the two images which comprise each piece, unifying the image in one single plane, but also as a symbolic reference to the presence and permanence of a historical time implicit in the place. From this series on, the artists establish keys to a method of investigation into the landscape which acts as an archaeological study of the memory in search of the appreciable weave left by the passage of different times on the same plane. The far-from-easy objective of capturing the historical past, of the materialisation of time which is sought in these battlefields creates in Bleda y Rosa what Didi-Huberman referred to as a "contemplative awareness", which forms the confluence of a two-fold territory of memory in their images: memory of the spaces, and memory set in motion by the photographic when taking the shot. And in this sense their work is also a fitting metaphor of the relationship between history and photography, between time and image, in the profoundly Benjaminian sense of the power of the image to experience that which cannot come to light.

CIUDADES (Cities)

The reference to that which cannot come to light, to that past which is never before us as such, which concluded the commentary to *Battlefields* is also an appropriate point of arrival to the *Cities* project. In late 1997 and coinciding with the first day of winter, Bleda y Rosa began work in Castellar de Meca, initiating their project of travelling the Iberian Peninsula and stopping at a number of towns that could be representative of what, for them, could have been a Greek, Roman, Phoenician, Iberian or Celtic city and, by extension, of what could be the traces left by those cultures on the peninsular geography. *Cities* is without a shadow of a doubt the most open and least uniform series of all they have carried out to date. There are two reasons for this. In the first place, the two artists' manifest intention to allow the experience of visiting these cities to filter through their work; and in second place, the fact that this project, to a large extent, served them as a laboratory for their quest for new perspectives and lines of work. The attempt to address the physical and cultural mark left on a territory by different cultures, combined with the decision to incorporate the artists' own experience of the place converts this series into a complex reflection on the condition of the act of remembering and on the relationship we maintain with memorialisation processes. Something which, once again, has a lot to do with the essential relationship of the photographic medium with ruins and remains, as well as with ghosts and spectres. This is an auspicious reference with which to define with a certain degree of clarity Bleda y Rosa's look at ruins and monuments. While in *Battlefields* material remnants of the past had been approached only tangentially, in *Cities* they form an inevitable part of the contemplation of the passing of time. Their look is not one which would correspond to an attempt at materialisation of the monuments' past, but rather one that corresponds to the reading of historical remains in the deep sense granted to the term by Jean Luc Nancy: "The vestige is the remains of a step". A landscape, a succession, a course that marks a rhythm between the visible and the invisible, a go-out-and-face it. This is how Bleda y Rosa's interest manifests itself – in the reminiscence that can detach itself from the material, the possibility of shedding light on the darkness that inhabits the space of the memory, rather than the simple reminiscent function of the monument.

In parallel to the capability of finding in natural elements (the sea, clouds, rocks and the firmament) the same capacity to materialise reminiscence that can be seen deposited in monuments, with this series Bleda y Rosa also initiate the exploration and contemplation of the constructive, of building, as specific condensation of the diluted and dispersed fragments of the past. Observation that will eventually occupy greater centrality in future works.

The nocturnal vision of a star-filled sky with which *Cities* closes could not be more metaphorically explicit. Walter Benjamin saw in starlight an example of the fluctuation between appearance and disappearance: "That light, which in a flash crosses thousands of years, projects an illumination in which the present carries with it the most distant past, and the far-away past suddenly crosses the present moment" (1). This emergence of the past in the present that we can read in the light of a star can also be read in the work of Bleda y Rosa.

(1) Eduardo Cadava, *Trazos de luz. Tesis sobre la fotografía de la historia*, Palinodia, Santiago, Chile, 2006, p. 76

ORIGEN (Origin)

The importance of the *Battlefields* series within Bleda y Rosa's creative itinerary in the sense of establishing conceptual and methodological guidelines can be appreciated in the *Origin* project, in which they return to and develop two elements present in that work: the panoramic format and the inclusion of text-legend to accompany the photographs. The references from which this proposal starts out are "The Origin of Species" by Charles Darwin, a text which opens the debate on the origin of man, and the collection of archaeological discoveries which throughout recent centuries and up to the present time have drawn a geographical and time-based map on the origin of our species. These are the sites in which remains have been found that indicate a new link or direction in the reconstruction of man's origin and which began to appear in large-scale, panoramic photographs as from 2003. The artists themselves have mentioned on occasions that they were interested in contextualising the project historically and demonstrating what was happening with photography and how territory was being represented pictorially at the time Darwin developed his theories: the moment of the romantic painting, and the beginnings of travel photography and of the "Heliographic Mission". As occurred in *Battlefields*, with references to the painting of history and battles, here there are also aesthetic references, but there are keys which in this set of images never become models, rather they are structured as contextual references of a historical nature. Thus a further time strata is incorporated, deposited in the very heart of the landscape, which in a certain way joins in with the collision of times that characterises Bleda y Rosa's singular perception.

In fact, *Origin* appears as a more complex series in this sense by establishing a varied set of connections between different historical and cultural times: alongside the previously mentioned contextual references of an aesthetic nature, appears the here and now of the photographic shot, the evolutionary time which establishes the archaeological discovery that took place in each spot, the prehistoric or *original* time that fixes the text associated to the image, and the marks, traces or structures of work associated to the very archaeological site that precisely seem to indicate visible cracks and fractures in time. In fact, it is these fractures, these places in which it is possible to visualise and establish the interweaving of temporalities, both historical and cultural, that attract the interest of Bleda y Rosa in this allegorical cartography of the world's course that *Origin* represents. A geography whose interpretive key is the dialectical collection of permanencies and transformations which incorporates history in each of its movements and which in this series takes the form of a huge stage featuring the more or less visible wounds that man opens up in the territory in search of his origin and his past. Over these wounds, which tell of an enormous fracture in time in which man believes he perceives progress and distance, the images in *Origin* remind us that, when all is said and done, we occupy a relatively fixed place in the movement of history and that the spaces we inhabit or may inhabit will always be spaces with a past in which permanence and renewal coexist simultaneously.

ARQUITECTURAS (Architectures)

At different moments throughout their career Bleda y Rosa have addressed projects of lesser importance, on occasions brought about by specific photographic commissions and which, taken as a whole, have eventually resulted in a central core of work from which emerged the possibility of formulating re-readings of their own work or of the creation of new perspectives. Something along these lines occurred in its day with the *Cities* series, a project which led to the appearance of new interests in their oeuvre, especially with respect to the opening up of their reflection on time and space as regards architecture, and the broadening of the geographical framework of their investigation. The group of works brought together under the term *Architectures* unites several of these lines of work, related by a link centred on study of the architectural, of that which is constructed. In this series they revive their characteristic interest in the repository of history and memory, in temporary atmospheres, but now addressed from a dialogue with the historical sense of their functionality, be it work and production, construction and administration of the memory, habitability or centres of power. The history-space-memory dialectic is thus enriched with the inclusion of a new element: functionality, or more specifically, the nature and cultural condition of architectural spaces.

Rooms, Memorials, Corporations and Typologies, the four lines of work gathered under the title *Architectures*, nonetheless share the common interest, essential in Bleda y Rosa's career, in capturing the resonances that break away from the material, the invisible atmospheres and the temporary breath which reside in the petrified memory of the constructed. This two-fold process of emergence of the past in the present and of breathing the past in the present configures the special visual density that these images possess and which, to a certain extent, takes us back to the experience of the aura: that distance which appears, only to remove itself, that presence in retreat, that mixture of air and absence. A singular, strange weave of space and time.

The new dialogue which nevertheless is reconstructed and strengthened in this set of works, in parallel to the common trunk they share with the rest of the series, is the dialogue which is established between memory and imagination. Clément Rosset provides a convenient assignment for each of these terms: the relative security and precision of the memory situated in the order of time is opposed by the constituent uncertainty of the imagination placed in the order of space. If the former is more favourable for the perception of that which is absent, the latter is more propitious for the calling up and free suggestion of images. Bleda y Rosa's *Architectures* share at the same time that capability to perceive the traces of an absent past and that power to separate our experience of places from the strictly rememorative, descriptive and functional, in order to open it up to evocation and suggestion.

ESTANCIAS (Rooms)

As an almost necessary derivation of the process initiated in the *Cities* series, Bleda y Rosa began photographing spaces related with the city in 2001. The need then arose for them to establish a new itinerary-journey, a new cartography, this time with the cities-origin from where cultures established in the Iberian Peninsula had emerged and that were recorded in that series. The fragments of buildings and the ruins they had started to photograph enabled them to perceive some of the city's basic structures – the houses, the rooms – which led them to focus on the architectural element. And from here, their attention and special interest in symbolic, monumental spaces – palaces, stately villas, regal towns – that present a two-fold nature: they were centres of power and decision, but also inhabited spaces, private places where important personalities once lived. This double condition also speaks to us of a double temporality, that which corresponds to the time of the historical event and that which belongs to the biographical, personal time. This special tension in the nature of the spaces that make up *Rooms* is captured and accentuated by Bleda y Rosa through fragmentation of the architecture: columns, floors, corners, walls and doors recall a private, nearby space that resists monumentalisation. This approach of "getting close up" to detail operates in *Rooms* as a special kind of *detention*, like a petrification of the movement of history that allows us to experience the place with an almost physical sensation of time. Bleda y Rosa's images neither describe nor situate us in the *Rooms*, rather they make us experience them and return to them through a process of evocation.

MEMORIALES (Memorials)

With this work, Bleda y Rosa inaugurate a project dedicated to reflection, both on the categories of memorialisation as well as on the conditions of monumentalisation of the memory. There can be no doubt that the question is particularly appropriate and opportune in the context of their art. The first series to be carried out within this block of work is devoted to a reflection on the traces of memory in the city of Berlin. Their position on approaching the project is consequent with their career taken as a whole, as is well demonstrated by the lines written by the artists some time before creating these images and which fit in perfectly with the spirit behind them: "When we speak about the places of memory, an essential element in our landscapes, we perceive the danger inherent in monumentalising a place, because history is the difficult reconstruction of what no longer is. There is a huge difference between the memory – which by its very nature is open to change and evolution, to recall and oblivion, to reinterpretation – and the monument which, in contrast to the memory, loses its capacity to evoke as it acquires power, because it seems more interested in being seen than in making us see that which it represents". Travelling the city of Berlin, the issue of the direct relationship between memory and monument becomes especially relevant to the artists. Their work never fails to allude to and evoke any of the complex questions associated with such a powerful pair of words: materialisation of the memory of the city's fabric; the condition of the places being recalled; the imprint of trauma on the fabric of the city; the progressive loss of function of memorials; and the abuse of memory.

CORPORACIONES (Corporations)

Corporate architecture has always been associated with the symbolic capital it generates and with its capacity to construct identity. It is on this basis that Bleda y Rosa decided to begin a reflection on the fact that for centuries architecture has been subjected to the idea of the very corporation that this architecture represents, a practice evidencing a pronounced boom in these present times. Their intention is to review how companies, universities and cities leave a mark of their identity and what they symbolise through their architecture.

The first project in this line of work focuses on a corporate organisation: the Spanish telecommunications multinational Telefónica. The physical framework of the project was the construction and opening of Telefónica's new operational headquarters in Madrid, a new work-centre and service-orientated city known as District C. Bleda y Rosa take a direct in-depth look at what is meant by this city of services, which bases a good deal of its conception on the development of new working methods and modifications in industrial relations. In this series, comprising six photographs, three interior shots of the former Telefónica headquarters in Madrid's Gran Vía are compared with three aseptic interiors of the new construction, contrasting the two atmospheres and the different conceptions on which they are built. The company's previous home is represented as a place belonging to the territory of the past, to that of tales and imagination, removed from reality by a new corporate headquarters and a new idea of work, performance and business organisation, which lacks history and sets out to design the future.

TIPOLOGÍAS (Typologies)

With this series, the most recent of all carried out to date, Bleda y Rosa take on the complicated task of developing a comprehensive catalogue of architectural typologies. In a certain way the central nucleus of the work continues to be situated in the reflection on repositories of memory, in this case with a direct reference to their relationship with the concept of the archive and the tension between document and monument.

Their first works in this project were carried out in the context of a commission involving the historical remains of the city of Tarragona. Bleda y Rosa situated their work in the outskirts of the urban centre, in the Roman villa of Els Munts. Faithful to their focus on the sediments of history, their approach to the setting is based on a reading of remains as a space of transit and scenery. Their "contemplative awareness" is equivalent here to an implicit process of historical reconstruction which links architectural specificity to the activity carried out on this spot. It is scenery that takes us from the original purpose of the place to its museumisation. The traces of functionality, corresponding here to a kind of primogenital memory, are reinforced by the presence of a text which describes the typology from which they originated. Moreover, evidence of the process of heritage recovery is equally visible. In this encounter, past and present are reciprocally dismantled. A reflection which, on the other hand, can easily lead us to

think of a condition that is essential in our age: the accelerated and progressive distancing of objects and places with respect to their function and origin.

Alberto Martín