

Conservation of the contemporary public sculptures of Granada. Protecting the city's Heritage

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Abstract: Contemporary urban sculpture is an integral element of the landscape of the city of Granada (Spain). Therefore, the objective of this research is to determine the conservation status of several public sculptures -produced by Miguel Moreno Romera- situated in the city and which currently evidence the need to improve their conservation, through restoration work or by optimising their preservation conditions. The study results show the alterations in the works, evaluates their damage, detecting possible deterioration and proposing interventions in order to reduce these problems, activating a preventive action protocol. In conclusion, there is a significant need to improve the conservation of these public sculptures by restoring their appearance, which also has positive effects on the city because they are an integral part of the urban fabric and bring the city closer to citizens.

Key words: public sculpture, conservation, bronze, city of Granada, contemporary art.

Conservación de las esculturas públicas contemporáneas de Granada. Protección del Patrimonio de la ciudad

Resumen: Las esculturas urbanas contemporáneas son un elemento integral del paisaje de Granada (España). Por ello, el objetivo de esta investigación es determinar el estado de conservación de varias esculturas públicas situadas en la ciudad, hechas por Miguel Moreno Romera, que en la actualidad presentan la necesidad de mejorar su preservación, siendo restauradas u optimizadas sus condiciones de conservación. Los resultados del estudio exponen las alteraciones de las obras, la evaluación de sus daños, la detección de los posibles agentes de deterioro que les afectan, la propuesta de intervención para reducir estos problemas y la activación de un protocolo de actuación preventiva que las beneficie. En conclusión, existe una importante necesidad de mejorar la conservación de estas esculturas públicas y renovar su imagen también repercutirá positivamente en la de la ciudad, porque son piezas integrales de su tejido urbano que la hacen más cercana al ciudadano.

Palabras clave: escultura pública, conservación, bronce, ciudad de Granada, arte contemporáneo.

Introduction

Contemporary public sculpture is an integral part of the landscape of a city, as well as being representative of its culture and identity. By understanding it as an artistic work located in a collective space, it grants the urban context a social and aesthetic identity that is charged with commemorative, historical, political and landscape significance, although its most important aspect must be its cultural value, substantiated by its creative concept and artistic accomplishment, in order for it to be considered as a dynamic element of the interaction between citizens, the place and its significance.

By understanding urban sculpture as an object "thrown into a space, with citizens commune, through its infinite visual approaches" (Marín-Medina 1977: 10) -compared to the more traditional conception of public sculpture-, we can observe that on many occasions these kinds of artworks do not receive appropriate care -which would benefit their preventive conservation-, thus neglecting the need to preserve and properly restore them, causing their poor state of conservation while they occupy key locations on public roads or areas (roundabouts, parks or squares), which implies a downgraded view of the city. However, public spaces must be displayed like museum pieces, because they are inhabited by man and

sculpture humanises space by turning it into a place for the timeless dialogue of citizens with history, urban planning, architecture, landscape, tradition, local culture and art. Therefore, an open museum becomes necessary, with no ceiling, no walls, allowing the sculpture to be in direct contact with the daily life of residents, making them -consequently- feel it as an integral part of their environment (Bellido 2017).

The city of Granada has numerous sculptures in outdoor public places. These include a significant number made by the sculptor Miguel Moreno Romera (Granada, 1935), who produces figurative works influenced by Brancusi and Henry Moore. Moreno initially trained as a goldsmith, he studied at the Granada School of Applied Arts and Crafts and eventually studied at the San Fernando School of Fine Arts in Madrid. He has received the most important artistic awards and set up his public works in many cities. His works represent the artist's sensitivity towards the study of the human figure and human condition, metaphor, abstraction and the animal world. He develops monumental works and metal craftwork. Julio Rodriguez said about him:

Probably the uniqueness of Miguel Moreno's work stems from the symbiosis produced in it by his craft training -acquired in one of the most remarkable and traditional metal workshops of Granada, of which he was a pioneer- and his superior academic education, as well as his obsession with finding new ways of expressing his imagination and strength, always managing to find -dazzling those who follow his work- new and always accurate paths (1997: 8).

The monumental works of Moreno are not only characterised by their themes, but also by their technique, which emphasises the use of molded and welded metal sheeting to create sculptural volumes and a detailed study of hollows and concave-convex shapes that vitalise the expressiveness of forms. Thus, he "subjects the reality of the figure to its significance (...), almost managing to hide -from some points of view- real identities inside mysterious fragments" (Meadows 1988: 26). These are not defined spaces, which in many of his sculptures made with molded sheeting are left empty, with no matter, allowing them to interact with the surrounding space, which in turn can be observed through their hollows, as it occurs in the case of *Venus de Armilla* [*Venus of Armilla*](2007).

Amongst the Miguel Moreno sculptural works that are set up in the city of Granada, we find *Águila* [*Eagle*] (1973), a monument made of forged brass sheet and autogenous welding (170 x 120 x 80 cm), located at the Federico García Lorca Granada-Jaén Airport; *Luna* [*Moon*], made of stone, of monumental proportions, situated at the post office roundabout, at the junction of Avenida de Pulianas, Street Pedro Machuca and Street Periodista Luis de Vicente, in addition, this work has a smaller sized 1974 replica which was cast in bronze (60 x 60 x 27 cm); *Homenaje al trabajo*

[*Homage to Work*], made in forged and welded metal sheet (approximately 400 cm high), located at the Metropolitan and Industrial Park of Granada; *Fray Leopoldo de Alpanseire* (1997), made of forged sheeting and autogenous welding, (approx. 230 cm. high), located in Jardines del Triunfo; *Panteón del pintor Manuel Maldonado* [*Pantheon of the Painter Manuel Maldonado*] (1985), lost wax bronze, chiseled and patinated (200 x 190 cm), exhibited at the cemetery of San José; *Reencuentro* [*Reunion*], made with the same technique (320 cm high), exhibited in Parque 28 de Febrero; *San Juan de Dios* (1986), made in forged and welded sheet metal (210 x 170 x 88 cm), situated at the entrance door of the San Rafael Clinic; *Venus Iliberis* (1977), cast in bronze and patinated (330 cm wide), which can be seen in the Jardines del Campus de Fuentenueva de la Universidad de Granada; Yehudá ben Sául ibn Tibbón (1988), lost wax bronze, chiseled and patinated, mounted on Calle de la Colcha; *Pareja* [*Couple*] (1996), made of forged and welded sheet metal (100 cm high), placed in the Zaidín Park; *Monument to Antonio Gallego Burín* (1999), cast in bronze and placed in the gardens of the artist's home workshop; *San Juan de Dios* (2000), made with the same technique and mounted in Jardines del Triunfo; *San Juan de la Cruz* (2010), made with a mixed technique (cast and forged metal), 220 cm high, also located in Jardines del Triunfo; and *Gran Capitán* [*Great Captain*] (2010), a monument to Gonzalo Fernandez de Córdoba, built in forged and welded sheeting (150 cm high), located on the Avenida de la Constitución boulevard.

Objectives

In face of various studies (Martin 2006: 15-33) that demonstrate that there is a real problem in terms of the adequate exhibition of bronze sculptures exposed to the elements and their continuous exhibition, the overall objective of this work is to determine the conservation status of several public sculptures of the city of Granada produced by Miguel Moreno, which have evidenced the need to improve their preservation, urging for their restoration or the optimisation of their preventive conservation conditions, without thereby losing their location, and proposing measures and actions to ensure such improvements.

Other specific objectives include: an analysis of the alterations observed in the works, an assessment of the damage seen in them, the identification of deterioration agents affecting them, determining their general condition, recommendations for their improved maintenance and the proposal of a protocol of preventive actions to ensure their preservation.

Methodology

For this study we have chosen the works *Luna*, *Venus de Ilibiris*, *Gran Capitán* and *Yuhedá ben Saúl ibn Tibbón*

because they are located in different parts of the city and because their antiquity, technique, materials and state of conservation differ.

The methodology used was theoretical and practical. It included a documental study and an on-site visual analysis of the works, which has enabled the direct observation of the alterations they present.

The documentary contextualization has focused on analysing research covering the conservation of sculptures, including the one conducted on the Leganés Sculpture Museum, some works from the Reina Sofía Museum in Madrid (García 2008: 23-31), public sculptures in the town centre of Aracena, pieces from the Museum of Contemporary Art of Andalusia (Camacho and Roldán 2011: 223-240), as well as the work undertaken on the *Conexiones urbanas* [Urban connections], exhibition organised by the IVAM (Valencia 2009, Alicante 2010) (Martinez and Vazquez 2011: 191-200) and that which was conducted on the sculptures bequeathed by the Universal Exposition of Seville -mounted in Isla de la Cartuja (Roldán *et al.* 2005: 125-130)-, and more general queries carried on the issues of conservation of sculptures in urban and natural settings (Blázquez 2011: 15-33), plus texts devoted to the artistic production of Miguel Moreno (Marín-Medina 1977 and 2007).

Results and discussion

The results obtained determine the alterations presented by the works studied.

—Luna

The sculpture *Luna* (Figure 1 and 2) was inspired by Federico García Lorca's *Romance de la Luna* [Romance of Moon], and it forms part of the *Trilogía Lorquiana* [Lorca Trilogy] with the sculptures *El poeta* [The poet] and *Ciprés* [Cypress]. Its circular composition features curved and enveloping shapes and is composed of large blocks of natural stone (travertine marble) which are bound together. It is situated at the centre of a large roundabout, which completes its design with vegetation. Its floor mounting was made with concrete formwork and an intermediate steel plate anchoring.

Amongst the work's alterations, we find the superficial discolouration of the stone due to weathering damage as well as the effect of ultraviolet rays, humidity and temperature changes. We can also see a widespread layer of dirt, which sharpens the change in colour and the stone finish, both aggravated by the presence of stains of various tones and types, such as those produced by graffiti, saline layers or fungal colonisation -located in the places that are most sheltered from light, dryness and high temperatures-, apart from those caused by rainwater runoff, dew, animal



Figure 1.- Miguel Moreno, *Luna*. Natural stone, monumental proportions. Source: María del Carmen Bellido.



Figure 2.- Miguel Moreno, *Luna*. Natural stone, monumental proportions. Detail of the work's damage. Source: María del Carmen Bellido.

excrement and the accumulation of solid waste pollutants. The natural degradation of the stone produced by the dissolution and dissociation of the material has directly affected this sculpture, due to the sudden environmental changes that are typical of the city (great contrasts of temperature and humidity), the work's own design and the characteristics of its materials, which produce the accumulation of water on its surface and internal infiltrations, which may even cause material break up and cracks due to the accumulation of internal salt crystals (sub-efflorescence) in cavities and joints. Air pollution

aggravates these circumstances since air pollutants generate surface pollution accumulation and rainwater acidity, which favours the alteration of the materials.

We can also see that this work has suffered damage in terms of the synthetic material used as the adhesive to join its various stone blocks, by changing its colour or disappearing in many parts, ceasing to act as a binding element, which has resulted in noticeable gaps between its structural parts. This same material is distributed over much of the surface of the sculpture, having been used as a binder of pebbles, which serve as the filling of the stone's hollows.

Along with the damage described above, garbage and waste were found surrounding the piece, affecting its aesthetic contemplation, and there is no evidence of delimitation, site fencing or specific surveillance of the monument.

In general, the sculpture has been affected in its stone structure and the adhesive used for its construction due to environmental agents, exacerbated by the effects of the irrigation of the surrounding vegetation, environmental pollution, biodeterioration, vandalism, animal droppings and urination, and lack of specialised care and cleaning of the surrounding environment. Consequently, the work is in a bad state of conservation and its restoration is recommended, as well as a thorough cleaning of the sculpture itself and the surrounding site, the removal of current synthetic adhesives and use of more stable materials, protection of the stone surface, its maintenance and surveillance.

-*Venus de Ilíberis*

The sculpture *Venus de Ilíberis* (1977) (Figure 3 and 4) was inspired by Henri Moore's recumbent female figures, as Moreno travelled to London shortly before the completion of this work. It is a gift from the artist to the University of Granada, and its most notable elements are its synthetic and organisation-based design (Marín-Medina 2007: 38), its horizontal distribution and great proportions.

This work is mounted on the grounds in a garden (which is closed at night time) on a surface of cement mortar, surrounded by vegetation. It was made in cast and patinated bronze, and because of its location it interacts with the landscape and people visiting the park.

The work presents alterations caused by changes in the colour of the patina due to environmental reasons, the irrigation of the garden and the pollution it is subjected to. It also has scratches, surface graffiti and an accumulation of organic residue from plants and animals. Therefore, its conservation status is intermediate and a thorough surface clean is recommended, as well as the stabilisation of its patina, redirecting the irrigation systems in order

not to affect the sculpture, controlling the growth of the surrounding vegetation (grass and bushes), carrying out periodic checks on it, as well as maintenance and surveillance.



Figure 3.- Miguel Moreno. *Venus Ilíberis*, 1977. Patinated bronze, 330 cm wide. University of Granada. Source: María del Carmen Bellido.



Figure 4.- Miguel Moreno. *Venus Ilíberis*, 1977. patinated bronze, 330 cm wide. University of Granada. Detail of the work's damage. Source: María del Carmen Bellido.

—*Gran Capitán*

The bust *Gran Capitán* (Figure 5) is situated on the ground on a rock stand. It was commissioned by the City of Granada and was made of moulded sheet metal. It is displayed open, without its rear part, giving great importance to its concave shape. It stands on a stone pedestal that separates it from the ground.

The rear open space of the work favours the accumulation of waste such as paper, dry leaves, animal excrement and garbage in general. It has also been affected by pollution and environmental agents. Its placement in a crowded and surveilled central location helps to reduce vandalism. Its conservation status is good and does not require restoration work, although periodic checks and timely maintenance are recommended.



Figure 5.-Miguel Moreno, Gran Capitán, 2010. Forged and welded sheeting, 150 cm high. Source: María del Carmen Bellido.

—*Yehuda Ben Saúl Ibn Tibón*

The sculpture *Yehudá ben Saúl ibn Tibbón* (1988) (Figure 6), inspired by the wise Jew and patron of translators, is mounted on a stone pedestal on the main street at the entrance of Realejo -an old Jewish quarter- in order to welcome visitors. It was commissioned to the sculptor by a relative of this historical figure and was built in cast and patinated bronze.



Figure 6.-Miguel Moreno. Yehuda Ibn Tibón, 1988. Lost wax bronze, chiseled and patinated. Details of the work. Source: María del Carmen Bellido.

Prior to its restoration, carried out in 2014, the sculpture had gold coloured feet, plus small graffiti and scrapes, all caused by vandalism. At that time, it was displaced from its pedestal -due to a sharp blow- and snatched from its anchorage, leaving one of its feet outside the pedestal base, making it hazardous even in terms of possibly harming the public. For this reason, it was cordoned off, removed and restored, eliminating graffiti, scratches, corrosion, salt, biodeterioration and improving its anchorage (City of Granada from 2013 to 2015: 5-7). Then, it was mounted again. Today, its conservation status is good, although more surveillance is recommended as well as carrying out regular checks and maintaining it properly.

Conclusions

The study conducted enabled us to observe that public sculptures in Granada contribute to defining the city, and that the analysed works created by Miguel Moreno have suffered environmental damage due to inclement weather (rain, UV rays, contrast and sharp differences in temperature and humidity), air pollution (greenhouse gases, acid rain, solid waste, etc.), irrigation and cleaning of the gardens and settings, as well as aggressive human action (scrapes, scratches), vandalism (blows, graffiti, garbage dumping, etc.) and neglect (dereliction), together with the effects of biodeterioration (men, animals, plants and fungi). Therefore, these works display aesthetic, physical, chemical and biological alterations that illustrate the need to promote a better conservation, since these agents accelerate the natural aging of its constituent materials.

Nevertheless, the studied sculptures evidence diverse states of conservation, ranging from good and intermediate to bad, yet despite the damage suffered they play an important role in the integration and dialogue between citizens and their everyday habitat, as they humanise the city and its open spaces. Therefore, they should continue being exhibited outdoors, although their conservation durability will be shorter than if they were situated in an enclosed and environmentally controlled space. This results in the need to carry out an appropriate preventive conservation plan to halt the accelerating process of degradation, stabilise their materials and ensure their maintenance. Hence the necessity to create and develop an action protocol to improve from now on the conservation of public sculptures in Granada and prioritise conducting a detailed study on their state of conservation, advising whether they need restoration work conducted on them, for the sculptures analysed here are an example of many others situated in the city in similar sites and conditions.

It is also necessary for there to be greater public awareness regarding the conservation of public artworks in Granada, as they are distinctive elements that define the city's spaces. This could be carried out by means of an awareness and collective heritage educational campaign -on the care and need to maintain the Sculptural Heritage of the city,

especially amongst children and youngsters, promoting lectures and guided tours for pupils of various city schools. Thus, the eradication of vandalism and neglect would be promoted by valuing the cultural heritage of the city, advocating it as an asset that belongs to all its citizens.

In addition, it is necessary to further the training of the maintenance personnel of gardens and public spaces of the city regarding the conservation of public sculptures, taking into consideration artists' own opinions on the proper exposure and maintenance of their works, to avoid any interventions conducted without considering their conservation criteria.

And finally, we must promote Public Administration sensitivity, by obtaining from them a commitment to provide funds –annually– for the maintenance of public works in the city and enable the necessary preventive action protocol, which should include periodic reviews to detect any changes arising. Thus, a preventive conservation plan would be activated, improving their material condition, placing value on them, motivating the public in terms of their maintenance and improving the good appearance of the city.

Acknowledgements

We would like to thank the University of Granada (Research Plan 2015-2016, Integrated Actions), the Research Group HUM-425 (Digital Culture, Heritage Conservation, Sculpture and Photography), the artist Miguel Moreno Romera and the City of Granada.

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