

STITCHES OF MODERN ARCHITECTURE

Óscar Alonso Molina

But nature hath adapted the eyes of the Lilliputians to all objects proper for their view: they see with great exactness, but at no great distance.

Jonathan Swift —Gulliver's Travels, chap. VI-

"My house is my life, it grows and dies with me," I once heard from a certain Spanish folk diva, a true-blooded one; and coming from a woman of her generation, it seemed like a new take on Cicero's famous *"Omnia mea mecum porto"*: everything I own, I carry with me. Because, we all feel at times that the whole world is encompassed, condensed and embodied in our house: the hut, the cave, the shelter, the nest... The exact center of the Universe! It's almost like a blessed return to the uterus, to the origin, where everything is seen in the most familiar and comforting light, leaving the strange "uncanniness" (the Freudian *unheimlich*) of that other, unsettling furniture that De Chirico found one day in the middle of the street; the furniture that would take him on his deepest journey into the metaphysical. We can read his detailed description in an exquisite essay entitled "Statues, meubles, et généraus," published in October 1927, in issue 38 of the *Bulletin de l'Effort Moderne*: "Maybe you have noticed what an unusual sight is formed by beds, mirrored wardrobes, armchairs, sofas and tables when they are seen, unexpectedly, in the street, in a setting that is not the familiar one: like when someone is moving, or in certain neighbourhoods, in the entryways of shops and dealers that display the best merchandise on the sidewalk. All of those pieces of furniture appear before us in a new light, disguised in a strange solitude; a profound intimacy develops among them, and you could even say that a mysterious sense of happiness flows through the narrow space they fill on the sidewalk, amidst the bustling city life and the busy comings and goings of men." Indeed, it is as though there were an arc of tension strung between the things we own and the things in the city we must share; between private and public property, and, definitively, between domestic and political spaces. Both inside and outside, our furniture and possessions invite us in with their most

agreeable features, bringing to halt the same forces that the social spaces set in motion, channelled in one specific direction: the symbolically and materially productive.

For that reason children have always played at handling (themselves in) a scaled-down world: from classic dolls, toy cars and toy horses; to Monopoly and the newest video games.

Bachelard's phenomenology offers an even clearer explanation, "The world is my imagination: The cleverer I am at miniaturizing the world, the better I possess it."

Doll houses provide the perfect example of everything I'm trying to say. The interior and exterior are not completely distinguishable, not because most of the time the front of the house has disappeared, or even because dollhouses often replicate in some hidden corner the same alcove in which they sit; but rather, because the fantasy world of the very owner is a phenomenal focus point of changing perspectives; this ultimately transforms these models in a kind of impossible place where —as Alice experienced in her wonderful adventures— girls can be inside and outside of the house at the same time, they can be great big and then a second later shrink before your eyes until they almost disappear... As you can see, the idea of perspective has an interesting role in all of this —almost as much as in the typical funhouses found in amusement parks— because it deals in a kind of measurement that is completely subjective and personal, separate from the efforts of the surveyor bound by geometrical principles. When a child plays with scaled-down models —projecting himself over them and inverting the size of the city and its architecture as well as the adult experiences and roles— he not only activates the powerful mechanisms of a child's fantasy world, but also affirms a physical participation in the real world. As Bachelard suggests in his analysis of the poetics of space, "the imagination is never wrong because it does not have to confront an image with an objective reality." This, especially, along with everything else I have mentioned, can be seen while contemplating the works of Gloria Martin. Art, in her hands, like in so many of the past millennia, can be summarized as an attempt —sometimes sweet, sometimes astringent, and occasionally just plain desperate— to make the world habitable, or at least interesting and manageable. Let it do just that, once more.

Ó.A.M. [Madrid, May 2009]