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La construcción popular en López Mezquita y sus primeras obras

The popular construction in López Mezquita and its first works

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Resumen-- José María López Mezquita fue un autor fundamental de la escuela figurativa española de finales del siglo XIX y mediados del XX, siendo un autor muy precoz. A través de esta obra se presentan dibujos realizados desde los 8 hasta los 16 años, donde muestra ejemplos de arquitectura popular, algunos son tipologías de edificios que ya no existen, lo que representa una colección documental de increíble valor histórico y de estudio. Una revisión de sus obras juveniles y su relación con lo popular, como punto de partida de una honestidad de estilo difícilmente igualable. Obras que son un compendio de la construcción popular que formaba parte de aquellos entornos en los que comenzó su desarrollo como persona y como pintor, así como un interesante contraste con la evolución de su estilo que reflejó a lo largo del tiempo, en vistas de ciudades como Granada, París, Madrid o Nueva York.

Palabras clave— Hormigón; agregado reciclado; resistencia a la compresión; resistencia a la flexión; módulo de elasticidad.

Abstract— José María López Mezquita was a fundamental author of the Spanish figurative school of the late 19th and mid-20th centuries, being a very precocious author. Through this work, drawings made from the age of 8 to 16 are presented, where he shows examples of popular architecture, some are typologies of buildings that no longer exist, representing a documentary collection of incredible historical and study value. A review of his youthful works and his relationship with the popular, as a starting point for an honesty of style that is difficult to match. Works that are a compendium of the popular construction that was part of those environments in which he began his development as a person and as a painter, as well as an interesting contrast with the evolution of his style that he reflected over time, in views of cities such as Granada, Paris, Madrid or New York.

Index Terms— López-Mezquita; Granada; painting; vernacular architecture; country-house.

I. INTRODUCTION

BEETWEN the mid and end of the nineteenth century, Granada became a must-see for many painters, attracted by the oriental charm of a city that preserved a historical past among its narrow streets that was revitalized by national authors such as Raimundo de Madrazo, Martín Rico, Wissel de Guimbarde among many others, as well as foreigners of the stature of John Sargent. John Haynes Williams, Jules Worms, Jane Emmet de Glehn and Wilfrid de Glehn. It is a reflection of

a tradition of the European movement that took so many authors to North Africa or Istanbul and that in Spain still had a stronghold in this Andalusian city (VVAA, 2004).

Among the many local painters who also portrayed the city on their canvases is José Larrocha, an author born in Granada in 1850, and who was mainly a landscape painter, especially of his hometown, with some not inconsiderable urban landscapes. He studied at the Special School of Painting, Sculpture and Engraving. He taught other important painters from Granada in his workshop and continued his teaching work in Madrid, as a

drawing teacher at the School of Fine Arts. In 1883 he won the Silver Medal at the Granada Exhibition. His stay in Madrid allowed him to strengthen ties with other authors such as the Valencian Cecilio Pla, who, attracted by the virtues of Granada, toured and portrayed the city and fell in love with the light, so fundamental in the Levantine school.

Both painters are the two great masters of a young José María López Mezquita. Born in Granada in 1883, his first works were self-taught, mainly drawings in graphite and charcoal, some portraits, but, above all, drawings of the nooks and crannies of the city. This led his parents, and especially his grandfather, to allow him to attend painting classes with Larrocha. José Larrocha, although he produced some very worthy works, has traditionally been considered a good draughtsman who, through his teaching, influenced the young José María with his technique (Asociación, 2019).

An unsubstantiated anecdote tells that, while Cecilio Pla was in Granada, he found a noticeably young López Mezquita playing hoop next to an easel with a canvas and that, when asked who the painter was, with a certain pride he replied that he was himself. Then Pla suggested that he go to Madrid to be his student. The truth is that they met in Larrocha's workshop, where López Mezquita had begun his training in 1892 at the age of 9 (Pérez Rojas, 2007). Finally, at the age of 16, López Mezquita left Granada to study in Madrid at the Royal Academy of Fine Arts and the workshop of Cecilio Pla.

It was precisely in these years, between the ages of 9 and 16, that López Mezquita studied and represented different places in the Nasrid capital and its Alfoz, a catalogue of works – some not even dated or adequately documented, almost all of them in private collections – that allowed us to collect images of a city and a way of building that had almost disappeared. It is his work, a way of approaching the popular and the traditional that will be a fundamental part of his future production with the commissions he will receive from the Hispanic Society from 1928 onwards.

II. DRAWING, PAINTING AND POPULAR CONSTRUCTION

Among those presented here is a first drawing from 1890, made when he was an astonishing 7 years old, which depicts an



Fig. 1: End of the Paseo de los Tristes. Granada. José María López Mezquita 1890 (Source: Private Collection)

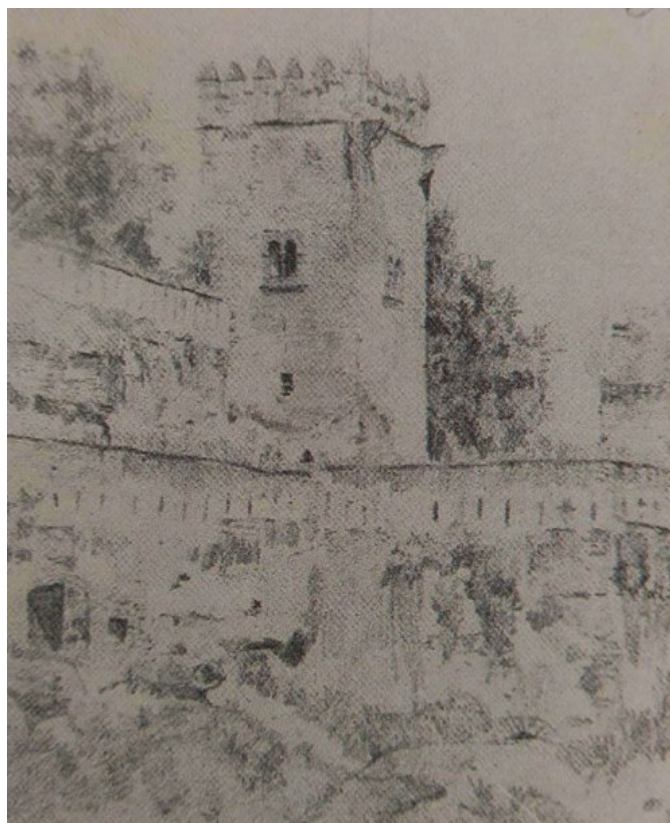


Fig. 2: Tower of the Peaks. The Alhambra. Granada. José María López Mezquita 1891 (Source: Pérez Rojas)

esplanade in which some houses are dotted with lush vegetation. A parapet can be seen as the limit of the far right with some decorative finishing elements at its opening to a path.

It is the end of the Paseo de los Tristes, where the parapet with the finials depicted in this drawing by López Mezquita still remains. The opening to the road is currently the Carretera del Rey Chico with the Aljibillo Bridge (11th century) over the Darro River. In the background, López Mezquita drew what is still the Casa de los Guardeses of the Palacio de los Córdoba.

In 1891 he made an interesting view of the Tower of the Peaks of the Alhambra, which would be an unavoidable element in any painter portraying the city, not least in the work of López Mezquita.

It is a tower that was also drawn three times by Sargent, whose drawings belong to the collection of the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York. Shortly afterwards he repeated a watercolour view of the Alhambra in which he put to the test the knowledge he was gradually acquiring in Larrocha's workshop. Both made paintings of the Cuesta de los Chinos that allow us to analyse the parallels between the two, as well as the influences of one on the other.

But it is the following works that bring us closer to the most popular Granada and to a way of living and building that is little present today. The following works were carried out in 1891. The drawing "A street in Granada" shows an alley that is lost in a very high perspective and with great depth, demonstrating the skill he had as an observer and draughtsman, with great knowledge of perspective, as can be seen in the windows of the house that are represented in conical perspective.



Fig. 3 and 4: Cuesta de los Chinos. Granada. (3) Larrocha, (4) José María López Mezquita 1895 (Source: El Albayzín exhibition catalogue)

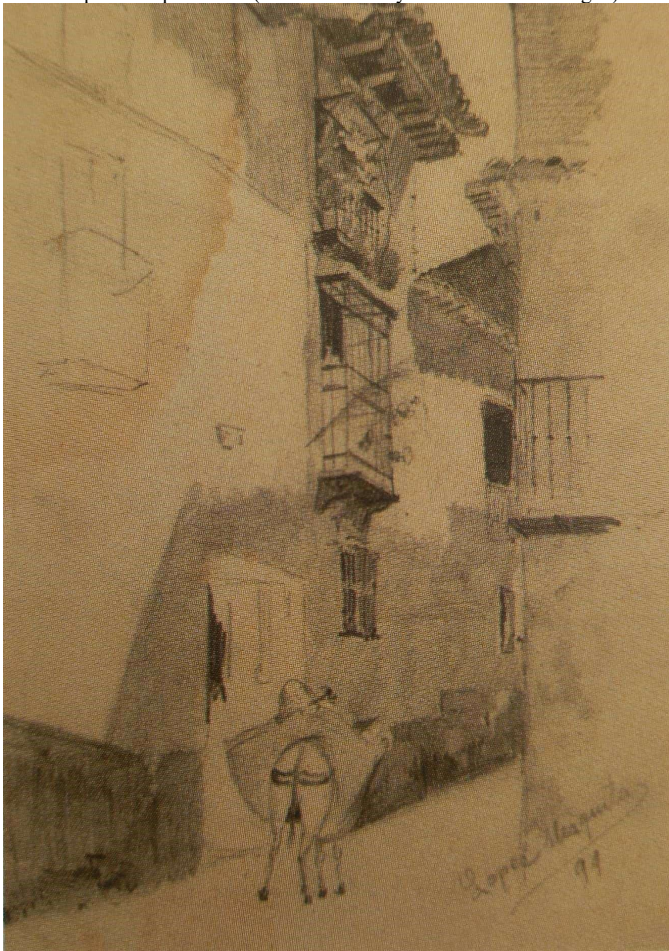


Fig. 5: A street in Granada. José María López Mezquita 1891 (Source: Pérez Rojas)

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Fig. 6: Calle de la Tiña in Granada. (Source: Gregorio García López de la Osa)

In addition, it allows us to discover a rare type of architecture, by presenting a three-storey manor house in which the top floor is complete and allows him to generate greater verticality and depth in the drawing. It is a chosen model because the most normal thing, in the Albayzín, is that the third floor does not exist, that is, it is low in height with chamber ventilation windows (under roof).

Especially relevant is the tile above the window of the top floor, with a very pronounced overhang, a sign of the undoubted economic potential of the owners of the house.

The following example is a drawing titled "People's House." The name, not specific with respect to the purpose of the building, must be attributed to the ignorance of the noticeably young López Mezquita. The construction characteristics allow us to affirm that it is a magnificent example of a drying room. But it is difficult to establish with total certainty that it is a tobacco drying plant in the Vega de Granada, since the first authorization for its cultivation dates to 1917 and the first "legal" harvest in 1924. On the other hand, it cannot be ruled out that it is a dryer built before the generalization of this product in the Vega, for self-consumption or trade on a very small scale, prior to these dates (García Nofuentes, 2017).



Fig. 7: Popular house. José María López Mezquita 1891 (Source: Pérez Rojas)

It is a two-storey building well differentiated in the graphics of the drawing. The upper one has the characteristic façade of vertical poplar wood planking, where the drying of tobacco was carried out, with its openings and openings and an external staircase with double wooden stringers through which it is accessed. Above this floor there is a gabled roof (García Nofuentes, 2017). All this takes place on a lower floor made of adobe masonry (Sorroche Cuerva, 2000).

From the drawing "House", marked with no. 29, his previous sketch has been discovered on the underside of the paper, when the painting for this work was unframed. This is probably the most interesting drawing of the pieces proposed here. The maturity of the line and the composition reveal an artistic concept far above that usual in a person of such an early age as the one López Mezquita has when he makes this drawing for the second time.

In the drawing you can see three buildings close to each other. The street to which the three have a façade, in the foreground, to the right of the drawing, is on a slope that ascends towards the back. The two closest ones are remarkably close or even close to each other, while the furthest one seems to be separated by a street or open space. Due to the dimensions of the pillar of the construction closest to the viewer, it is determined that the buildings have two floors, being even somewhat taller, in addition to being at the top of the slope, the furthest away.

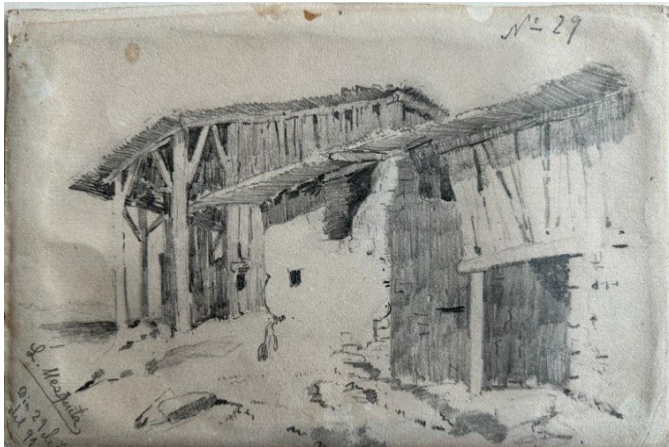


Fig. 8: House. José María López Mezquita 1891 (Source: private collection)

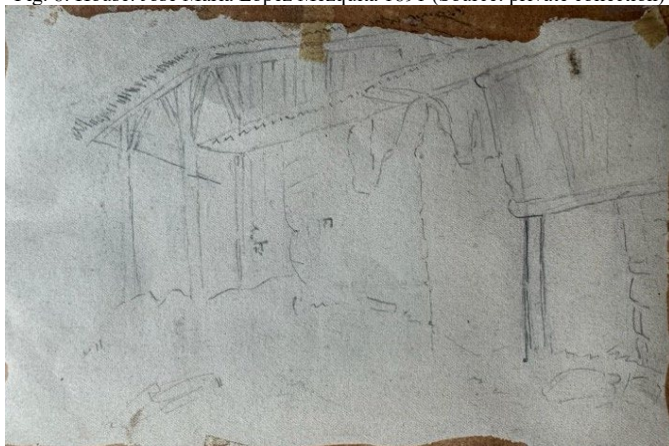


Fig. 9: Sketch of the house, on the underside. José María López Mezquita 1891 (Source: private collection)



Fig. 10: Cabin. José María López Mezquita 1891 (Source: Pérez Rojas)



Fig. 11: Mill. José María López Mezquita 189? (Source: private collection)

This is a construction made entirely of wood. It has a structure of straight feet of plump, and races braced with javelins, with a vertically boarded façade and a front porch. The roof is made of straw or tile, not allowing the shading graphics used and the point of view to be easily determined. Again, perfectly compatible with the characteristics of a tobacco dryer (García Nofuentes, 2017). The space of the porch is remarkably interesting, where López Mezquita plays with chiaroscuro to define the volumes, demonstrating the skill of an outstanding draughtsman.

The building in the middle of the plane is made, in all height, with adobe or stone masonry (given the dimensions of the pieces). The factory is severely damaged. The great overhang of the eaves of a roof is striking, which, for the same reasons as in the previous building, is not easy to define.

In the foreground there is a third building in which the two floors are made of varied materials, as in the drawing mentioned above. The lower part is again an adobe or stone masonry wall that does not completely close it, giving rise to a supported space supported with a right foot of wooden log. The upper floor is made of vertical wooden boarding. It also has pronounced eaves that overhangs the façade set back in relation to the neighbouring building.

La Cabaña, also from the same year, represents the most primitive form of habitation, of which it is possible that López Mezquita took as a model one of the last (Flores López, 1973).

The one depicted is of the gabled roof type perched on the floor (type V according to J. A. Hasler's classification) (Hasler, 1966). Probably used as a temporary shelter for shepherds in the region, being a frequent element in transhumance areas.

The cabin depicted has a straight round foot on the vertical edge of the meeting of the two skirts, dividing the entrance opening with a "mullion". The skirts are made of straw, possibly fastened in bundles that in turn are fixed to a light structure of horizontal "sticks".

With no visible date, the next drawing to be analysed is called a "mill". The mill is seen from a top position. In the foreground there is a sheet of water and two openings in the lower part of the façade, called gullies. Through these cavities the water current penetrates and moves two horizontal turbines called impeller. These wheels by means of a shaft transfer the movement to the millstones. It is, therefore, a mega-hydraulic type of mill. Above the gullies there is a large hole that gives light to the environment where the millstones are located (Reyes Mesa, 2000). On the roof, made of unrecognizable material, we can see the presence of stones, normally placed for fixing tiles in the wind, but in this case, they have very large dimensions, and may be pieces of stone due to landslides if the mill was in an environment with a steep slope and associated with a rocky wall.

Mills are a common type of construction in the province of Granada and of which there are still some important examples; the Víznar Mill, the Florencio Mill and the La Purísima Mill. It is possible that the mill is part of one of those that were in the Cuesta de los Chinos, as has been observed in Larrocha's work or in those that dotted the Vega de Granada, being certainly a common element in the orography of Granada. It could be one of these due to the proximity of access that López Mezquita would have had as a child to be able to make the drawing.

The last drawing to be described in this work is "A House on the Tagus", which also lacks a date. The location could refer to the Tagus River itself, which López Mezquita met on a family trip or through a print that he was proposed to reproduce in his drawing classes. But it could be an example of existing construction in the Tajo de la Alhama or in the Tajo de San Pedro, both areas of Granada.

In this case, we are inclined to believe that the diffuse treatment of the lower part of the drawing is intended to reproduce the reflection of the building in a body of water. Up to which the side staircase also reaches, forming some kind of jetty. It would therefore most likely be another mill. Although on this occasion there are no gullies. It is again, the childish simplification, which calls this construction a house, being a synonym for building, without specifying its function as a mill.

López Mezquita settled in Madrid between 1895 and 1896, where he studied painting at the Royal Academy of Fine Arts, and from then on drawing his works disappeared, and he produced mainly watercolours and oils. The works "La Cuesta de los Chinos" (The Slope of the Chinese) date from this period, again perhaps a reflection of Larrocha's influence.

The painting of "El Cortijo de la Parra", from 1899, brings us closer for the first time to the interior view of a building as typical and traditional Andalusian as the farmhouse, in this

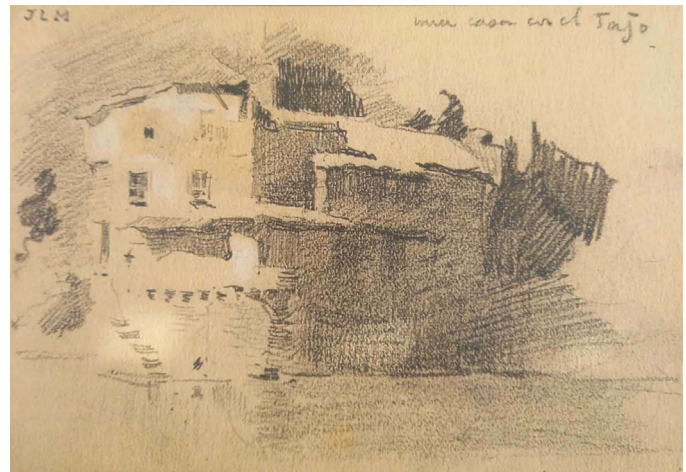


Fig. 12: A house in the Tajo. José María López Mezquita 189?
(Source: private collection)

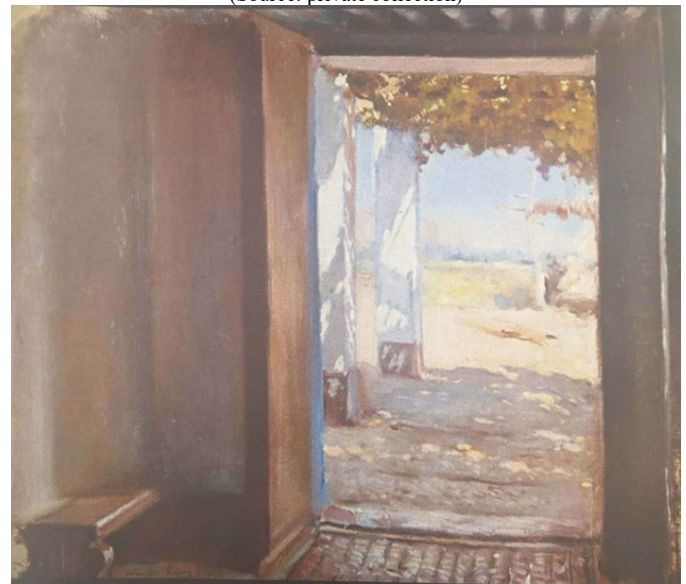


Fig. 13: The farmhouse of La Parra. José María López Mezquita 189?
(Source: Rodríguez Acosta Foundation)

case, owned by the Rodríguez Acosta family.

It allows us to get to know the private sphere of the houses, an interesting example of the way of understanding popular construction and its use, something that he would not abandon in other paintings that he would develop with his fame and work, already far from Granada. In any case, his way of understanding construction, which is part of everyday life, permeated the works that he popularized from the 1920s and 1930s onwards in the considerable number of pieces made for the Hispanic Society.

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