

# The reality of fiction The ECO by Mathias Goeritz

Fernando Quesada

1. La polémica fue desatada por la publicación en prensa en septiembre de 1975 de un memorándum firmado por Luis Barragán en el que acusa a Goeritz de minusvalorar su aportación al proyecto en diversas publicaciones mexicanas e internacionales. En su informe, Barragán considera que este fenómeno habría comenzado con la monografía sobre Goeritz editada en 1963 por Olivia Zúñiga, en la que Barragán aparece como 'arquitecto paisajista'. Más tarde se incorporaron a las discusiones en la prensa otras personas de los círculos de Barragán y Goeritz en un cruce de ataques mutuo que duró años. El archivo del CENIDIAP custodia la totalidad de recortes de prensa de esta polémica, que fueron cuidadosamente conservados por Goeritz a lo largo de los años.
2. El Espacio Escultórico es una obra de escultura en el paisaje de lava en las inmediaciones de la Ciudad Universitaria y fue firmado por el colectivo de artistas Hersúa, Helen Escobedo, Sebastián, Mathias Goeritz, Federico Silva y Manuel Felguérez.
3. GOERITZ, Mathias, "El Eco. Arquitectura emocional", *Cuadernos de Arquitectura*, n. 1, marzo de 1954, Guadalajara.
4. En orden cronológico han sido tres los principales críticos que han investigado la producción poética de Goeritz: Federico Morais, *Mathias Goeritz*, UNAM, México 1982; Lily Kassner, *Mathias Goeritz. Una biografía*, 2 vols., UNAM e INBA, México 1998; y Jennifer Josten, *Mathias Goeritz and International Modernism in Mexico 1949-1962*, Tesis Doctoral, Yale University, 2012, inédita.
5. Todas las monografías y catálogos de obra completa sobre Goeritz dan esta información además de él mismo en innumerables fuentes bibliográficas y de archivo. Olivia Zúñiga, *Mathias Goeritz*, Editorial Intercontinental, México 1963; Federico Morais, cit. 1982; Gerard Auer, *Mathias Goeritz. El Eco*, Deutschen Forschungsgemeinschaft, Brwnswick 1995; Ida Rodríguez Prampolini (ed.), *Los ecos de Mathias Goeritz*, 2 vols., catálogo de la exposición en el Colegio de San Ildefonso, INBA, UNAM, ONCA, México 1997; Lily Kasser, cit., 1998; Leonor Cuahonte, Mathias Goeritz (1915-1990), *L'art comme prière plastique*, L'Harmattan, París 2002; y Francisco Reyes Palma (ed.), *El retorno de la serpiente. Mathias Goeritz y la arquitectura emocional*, Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía, Fomento cultural Banamex y Fundación Amparo, Madrid 2014.
6. ASTA, Ferruccio, *La ética del expresionismo*, en Ida Rodríguez Prampolini (ed.), cit., pp: 25-37.
7. MORAIS, Federico cit., pp: 34-35, donde comenta las referencias que hizo Gregory Battcock sobre Goeritz como un 'antecedente no válido del Minimalismo' en la introducción a su antología *Minimal Art. A Critical Anthology*, Dutton, Nueva York 1968.
8. EDLER, Rita, *Ma Go: visión y memoria*, en Ida Rodríguez Prampolini (ed.), cit., pp: 37-47.
9. RODRÍGUEZ PRAMPOLINI, Ida. *El arte contemporáneo. Esplendor y agonía*, Pomaca, México, 1964. En este libro pionero Ida Rodríguez articula la relación entre las vanguardias históricas y las neovanguardias de su momento, además de revelar las raíces de las neo en el primitivismo, el expresionismo y el dadá.
10. RODRÍGUEZ PRAMPOLINI, Ida. *Lo mexicano en la obra de Mathias Goeritz*, en *Los ecos de Mathias Goeritz*. cit. pp: 183-195.
11. WESHTEIM, Paul. *Arte antiguo en México*, Fondo de Cultura Económica IFCE, México 1950. Edición consultada: Alianza Forma, Madrid 1988.
12. WORRINGER, Wilhelm, *Abstraktion und Einfühlung*. Múnich: R. Piper & Co. Verlag. Versión castellana: *Abstracción y naturaleza*. México: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1997, p. 30.
13. VISCHER, Robert, *Über das optische Formgefühl: Ein Beitrag zur Aesthetik*, Tesis Doctoral, Leipzig, Hermann Credner 1873. Versión inglesa consultada en Harry Francis Mallgrave, *Empathy, Form and Space. Problems in German Aesthetics 1873-1893*, The Getty Center, Los Angeles 1994, pp: 89-93 y ss.
14. KASSNER, Lily, cit., vol 1, p. 76.
15. TUDELLA LAGUARDIA, Chus, Goeritz, Mathias. *Recuerdos de España 1940-1953*, Prensas de la Universidad de Zaragoza, 2014, p. 19. Este libro es el único que, junto al artículo de Javier Arnaldo "Mathias Goeritz en la cultura española de posguerra. La ficción de una nueva prehistoria", *Kalias* n.13, 1995, pp: 93-105, ha investigado documentalmente la biografía de Goeritz en Alemania, Marruecos y España, y ayuda a reconstruir su complicada trayectoria vital gracias a una exhaustiva investigación de archivos.
16. O'GORMAN, Edmundo, *La invención de América*, Fondo de Cultura Económica FCE, México 1958, p. 9.
17. *Ibid.*, pp: 27-40.
18. *Ibid.*, pp: 42-43.
19. *Ibid.*, pp: 146-147.
20. *Ibid.*, p. 79.
21. RODRÍGUEZ PRAMPOLINI, Ida, *Amadises de América. La hazaña de Indias como empresa caballeresca*, Consejo Nacional de la Cultura, México 1948.
22. Así lo señala una reseña de su libro aparecida en *The Hispanic American Historical Review*, Duke University Press, 1949, pp: 386-388 y firmada por Irving A. Leonard, un historiador del colonialismo muy en sintonía con las ideas de Edmundo O'Gorman.
23. 'Al estudiar las crónicas y demás textos que me sirven de apoyo, me guía el sentimiento de apartarme de la manera tradicional de considerarlos; es decir, de sólo ver en ellos una especie de inventario de hechos y fechas que se aceptan como errores o verdades, según cierto criterio impuesto por el método llamado científico de la investigación'. RODRÍGUEZ, Ida. *Amadises de América*, cit., p. 15
24. *Ibid.*, p: 29. Cita 21.
25. *Ibid.*, pp: 81-88. Cita 21.
26. CELORIO, Gonzalo, 'El Quijote en la concepción de lo real-maravilloso americano de Alejo Carpentier', en *Casa del tiempo*, n. 83, dic-enero 2005, p.102
27. TUDELLA, Chus, cit.15, pág. 289.
28. Contrato entre Daniel Mont y Mathias Goeritz, CENIDIAP, Fondo Goeritz, México DF.
29. TUDELLA, Chus, cit.15, p. 336.
30. *Ibid.*,pág. 341.
31. *Ibid.*, pág. 339.
32. RIVERA, Diego, 'Arte puro, puros maricones', en Choque, Órgano de la Alianza de Trabajadores de las Artes Plásticas, México 27 de marzo de 1934.
33. MONSIVÁIS, Carlos, 'Los gays en México: la fundación, la ampliación, la consolidación del ghetto', en Debate feminista, año 13, vol. 26, México, octubre 2002, p. 97.
34. *Ibid.*, pág. 102.
35. Hoja volante, CENIDIAP, Fondo Goeritz, México DF.
36. Diario Excelsior, Sec. B, pp: 1-11, 14 de septiembre de 1983. CENIDIAP, Fondo Goeritz, México DF.
37. CISNEROS, Luis, informe dirigido al Sr. Regino Díaz Redondo, Director General del periódico Excelsior. CENIDIAP, Fondo Goeritz, México DF.

The formal and plastic journey of Mathias Goeritz's work (Danzig, 1915 – Mexico City, 1990) is hard to follow, since he made numerous inroads into many of the artistic languages of his time: expressionism, dada, surrealism, primitive art, informal painting, monochromatic abstraction, monumental abstract sculpture, land art, typography, concrete poetry, happening, and architecture. Moreover, Goeritz systematically built the biography of his life and artistic path by incorporating considerable amounts of fabulation.

Given the complexity of his pathway, criticism has systematically oscillated between mystification and unveiling. This was favored by the cunningness with which Goeritz handled his biography, along with his enormous capacity to generate controversy in the media. His work has always been controversial and was often haunted by the ghost of plagiarism, opportunism or authorship battles, such as the famous break up with Luis Barragán in the race for internationalization in which they clashed, in the aftermath of the enormous success of the Satellite Towers, in 1957.<sup>1</sup>

This discontinuity entails, however, two fundamental vectors of conceptual continuity. The first is that of the artist as a producer of contexts, a cultural and social actor that supersedes the work of researching an artistic language, in order to fully commit to tasks of organization, advertising and knowledge production, at all possible levels. The second is that of the artistic work understood as producer of a wide environmental space that includes the corporeal, architectural, urban, and territorial levels, conceiving the art work as the point of emanation of space. These two goals, in the case of Goeritz, maintained a relationship of complete subordination: the first was a vehicle for the second, at least if we read Goeritz's work as a major evolving project that took him from the practice of easel painting, in 1942, to the construction of large-scale environmental works, culminating in the Sculpture Space (*Espacio Escultórico*), carried out collectively with other artists in 1979-80.<sup>2</sup>

With the construction of the Experimental Museum *El Eco* in 1953, Goeritz realized his first complete work of 'Emotional Architecture', a category that he defined in a brief manifesto published the following year, pleading for architecture as an abstract spatial plastic assemblage generated out of pure form, planes and colors, in empathic reverberation with the human body.<sup>3</sup>

*El Eco* is a small building set around a courtyard, hidden from the street by a wall. The 7-meter high building is configured as a two-story L-shape around the courtyard. The entry is on the right through a vertiginous corridor with inclined telescopic walls and ceiling, so that the space acts as a perceptual accelerator of the movement of entering. At the end point of this corridor one enters the double height exhibition space, and from there in the courtyard. Closed to the street, the courtyard is conceived as an outdoor exhibition space or 'sculptural yard.' Both are connected through a large window with a cross-shaped carpentry, almost identical to the one built by Barragán for his house in Tacubaya, in 1947-48. Two staircases, one behind the bar and another for rear service, gives access to an upper floor with exhibition spaces and offices.

Behind the street wall, an isolated wall-piece called Yellow Tower (*Torre Amarilla*) set in the courtyard visibly stands out, with its 11 meters high, over the wall that separates it from the street. Goeritz carried out the construction works with the technical assistance of Diego Rivera's daughter, architect Ruth Rivera. The mythical pictures of Armando Salas Portugal produced, in more than one case, confusion between this work and works by Luis Barragán.

The Yellow Tower is a totemic form without any apparent function, halfway between sculpture and architecture, like the obelisk, which Goeritz called 'plastic prayer'. A metal 'hieroglyphic' was adhered to the tower. It was a bas-relief sculpture with an unintelligible text, prefiguring Goeritz's later experiments across concrete poetry. Next to the tower,

in the courtyard, another piece of sculpture was set up: the Snake (*Serpiente*), made of black metal and hollow. This piece was the heir to the sculptural series of animals made by Goeritz upon his arrival from Spain in Guadalajara, in 1949, whose most famous protagonist is, together with the Snake, *Animal del Pedregal*, installed in 1951 at the entrance of the urbanization *Jardines del Pedregal* on behalf of Luis Barragán. In addition, works by Henry Moore, Germán Cueto, Alfonso Soto Soria, and Carlos Merida were exhibited in *El Eco*. The building was inaugurated on September 7 1953, with an experimental ballet designed by Luis Buñuel – according to undocumented apocryphal sources –, with music by Lam Adomain and staging by dancer Walter Nicks. Goeritz also designed some small objects, furniture, tapestries and silverware<sup>5</sup>.

This building was, following the interpretation of the majority of the critics of Goeritz's oeuvre, a work of synthesis of the arts in the romantic tradition of the *Gesamtkunstwerk* that unified the arts in a single organism and placed the body at the center of space. In the empty courtyard Goeritz installed the two aforementioned sculpted figures, which could be interpreted as bodies, the Snake and the Tower, within which the bodies of the visitors could move, a fact clearly allegorized in the ballet.

The main critical readings of this building have proposed it as a late expressionist experiment<sup>6</sup>, an anomalous anticipation of Minimal art<sup>7</sup>, a homage to Zurich's Cabaret Voltaire by Hugo Ball<sup>8</sup>, or a cave of Altamira for the new modern primitive man<sup>9</sup>. These interpretations have repeatedly insisted on the recognition of this building as international art. Surprisingly enough, of all the great critical attention that Mathias Goeritz's *El Eco* has received, only Ida Rodríguez Prampolini (who was Goeritz's second wife and the mother of her only son Daniel) has mentioned the name of Wilhelm Worringer, albeit somewhat tangentially, referring to 'the Mexican' in the work of Goeritz.<sup>10</sup> She has insisted on Goeritz's deep knowledge of a book written by a disciple of Worringer, the German expatriate to Mexico Paul Westheim.

*Arte antiguo de Mexico*, published in 1950 by Westheim in Spanish (The Art of Ancient Mexico in the 1965 English version), was a book that Goeritz studied carefully. Westheim meant to propose an aesthetic of Mexican pre-Cortesian art which, according to him, had not yet been written, despite the abundance of descriptive and analytical texts published by archaeologists.<sup>11</sup> The book consists of three parts. The first part exposes the 'worldview' of pre-Cortesian cultures, predicated on four major characteristics: their theogonic systems; communal, non-individualistic forms of artistic production; their multifarious understandings of spirituality; and finally the ideas they handled over nature and natural forces. The second part focuses on 'expression' across three themes: the aesthetics of the pyramid, the mask, and the stepped fret. The third part analyzes concrete cases in different cultural, regional and geographical areas of ancient Mexico, such as the Tehotiucacana, Toltec, Maya, Chichen Itza, Zapotec, Aztec, and Tarascan cultures.

The tower with 'no function' in *El Eco* actually had a very clear function, from the interpretive lens enunciated by Westheim: to facilitate the sentimental projection of the visitor in the empty space of the courtyard. In *Abstraction and Empathy* (1907), Wilhelm Worringer had described how some rows of columns without any supporting function were placed in front of the Egyptian temples of antiquity, interpreting this fact as a resource to alleviate the agoraphobia or anxiety caused by emptiness. According to Worringer, those Egyptian columns were cultural residues of that phenomenon, offering spatial references to the eye, thus contributing to generate a sense of orientation in the space<sup>12</sup>. Westheim repeatedly offered similar arguments in his book.

Therefore, according to this interpretative fiction derived from Worringer's aesthetic system, abstraction is meant to produce sentimental projection, something

Goeritz called 'Emotional Architecture' in his manifesto of 1954. The figure of the Snake appears in the space as the primitive witness or the antecedent gesture of that procedure. Worringer drew his notion of empathy from the writings of various authors who preceded him: Hermann Lotze, Friedrich Vischer and his son Robert Vischer, Johannes Volkelt and Theodor Lipps. And although it is mainly derived from Lipps' scheme, Robert Vischer's work contains an unexpected conclusion that, in the case of Goeritz, is of the greatest importance: the relationship between sentimental projection and sociopolitical forms, which was at the center of the ethical project of German expressionism and was also part of the agenda of 'Emotional Architecture'. Vischer distinguished between two forms of empathy linked to two perceptive modes that happen in continuity. 'Immediate sensation' – which is static –, is followed by 'physiognomy empathy' – the motionless projection of the body onto the center of the matter that awakens sensation; whereas 'response sensation' – which is dynamic –, is followed by 'emotional empathy', which is a kinetic bodily response.<sup>13</sup>

The architectural form of *El Eco* completely eludes the right angle, symmetry and static geometry, inviting the actual movement of the spectator by using angular shapes in accelerated perspective. There is a shift from –physiognomic empathy based on a more or less mimetic anthropomorphism and clearly awakened by the Snake –, to an affective empathy, through the greater abstraction of the Tower and the detachment of the spatial forms of architecture from the formal logic of the human body and even the animal. By means of formal abstraction, integrating the movement of the spectator, the aim is to achieve a mode of empathy that grants a certain vitality to forms.

This aesthetic stance was not ignored by the interpreters of Goeritz's work at the time, and was also cherished by Goeritz himself. Yet Worringer, Vischer or any of the authors of the German space aesthetics that inspired Goeritz are largely absent from the critics' writings. According to Mexican art historian Lily Kassner, for example: '*El Eco* had an internal dynamics, as if the architectural elements had acquired vitality, or the qualities of a living organism, for the disposal of its walls and compartments was radially arranged according to the dynamic principle of diagonals, avoiding the symmetrical and formal repetition by rejecting the conventional structure of straight construction.'<sup>14</sup>

After having lived in Morocco since October 1941, and two years before his arrival in Mexico, in early 1947, Goeritz had settled in Madrid. In Morocco he was as a delegate to the German Consulate in Tetouan Cultural Institute, hired by the German Embassy in Spain.<sup>15</sup> This fact refutes the fictions Goeritz built about himself upon his arrival in Spain, fabulations about his life that have prevailed ever since, and were fueled by the critics after his death. Some fabulations meant that he had to flee Germany both due to his Jewish origin and strong disagreements with National Socialism. However, the documentation Goeritz carefully filed in his own archives states that he was born to a German family of evangelist religion. The facts of having been a public employee of the *Deutsche Akademie* of Munich during his stay in Morocco, a scientific assistant to the National Gallery in Berlin, and to be granted the permission from the House of Culture in Berlin to publish his doctoral thesis – all three institutions firmly controlled by National Socialism – add a strong novelistic or fictional component to Goeritz's biography. From the beginning, the path of Mathias Goeritz was marked by an enormous tension between fiction and reality. Literary fiction, rather than demanding to be unveiled in order to make truth come to light, can in this case be considered, just like in all the cases in which fiction intervenes in history, as a machine that not only produces interpretive truths but also, and more importantly, works that persist well beyond their interpretations.

A photograph from 1968 shows us Goeritz playing a pose before a revolutionary mural by Guillermo Chavez, so that he seems to snatch the sword from the painted

figure, performing a knight in some kind of guerrilla parody. Twenty years earlier, in the summer of 1948, Goeritz and his wife at the time – German photographer Marianne Gast –, met three Mexicans in Santillana del Mar, north of Spain: painter Alejandro Rangel, and very shortly after Josefina Muriel and Ida Rodríguez Prampolini. These three students made up the 'group' Goeritz called 'pictorial School of Altamira', which he advertised tirelessly to build his ambitious project of a 'School of Altamira' to the spread of modern painting in Spain. Altamira was the site of the famous primitive cave covered with bison paintings and the 'school' actually existed between 1949 and 1951. Two major international conferences were held there, launched by Goeritz, who could not attend for he moved to Mexico shortly before the conferences took place.

Beyond the very history of the School, its genesis and its importance for the Spanish and international art of the moment, the presence of Ida Rodríguez Prampolini was key to the construction not only of the Goeritz fiction, but also of his real and brilliant career in Mexico, after he moved to that country in October 1949. Ida Rodríguez, born in Veracruz in 1925, had obtained his doctorate in history just before her trip to Spain, with a thesis supervised by Edmundo O'Gorman, who was the brother of architect and painter Juan O'Gorman and the author of some pioneering and controversial colonial studies. Edmundo O'Gorman's ideas circulated widely among his students way before their publication, and his intellectual authority was indisputable despite having many academic rivals. Not only was O'Gorman the mentor of Ida Rodríguez and her lifetime intellectual accomplice, but also her husband during a brief marriage that lasted only two years, beginning in 1948 with the return of Ida Rodríguez to Mexico after her intense Spanish stay.

Refusing the idea that America had been discovered 'a good day of October 1492,' O'Gorman proposed the thesis of the *invention of America*<sup>16</sup>. His research focused on the interpretations of the facts surrounding the discovery, rather than on the facts themselves. Christopher Columbus, returning from his fourth voyage, insisted that he had reached Asian lands, specifically the so-called archipelago of Cipango, or Japan. Already by then, at the turn of the fifteenth to the sixteenth century, an official and hegemonic (though contradictory) discourse of the discovery had started to emerge.

According to O'Gorman, the fact that the interpretation of that event as a discovery had remained unquestioned for centuries – despite the fact that even his starring agent Columbus had not admitted it, in his stubborn insistence on the Asian hypothesis –, turned into a value-laden nonsense that could only be dismantled not on the basis of facts, but their interpretations. These interpretations were ultimately responsible for the reading of 'what happened in 1492' as a discovery enterprise, which O'Gorman questioned in a radical fashion. What O'Gorman argued was that the term 'discovery' was not only absurd and false when confronted with documented historical facts (the Spanish Chronicles of the Indies), but that the term 'invention' responded more accurately to what really happened. This conceptual mismatch allowed the possibility of a specifically American historicity that was at the basis of its identity constitution, therefore modulated from canonically European conceptions of history, time and territory. Before being invented, America simply did not exist as such and could therefore not have been discovered.

O'Gorman thoroughly reviewed the literature of America's discovery, making clear that between the interpretation of, for example, Fray Bartolomé de las Casas, and that of Alexander von Humboldt, what one really finds is the very conception of historical time of their respective patterns of thought: the theological and the deterministic. The same event, an admiral who runs into an unknown land, is defined as a fact caused by a divine plan in the first case and by a scientific project

in the second.<sup>17</sup> In Casas's chronicle this event would be a demonstration of the existence of God; while in Humboldt's an unequivocal sign of the idea of historical destiny emanated from the ideal of scientific progress, typical of the nineteenth century.

What is deliberately at stake here is the distinction between event and act, and their mutual relationship, so that '*substantially the matter is to recognize that any act, when considered in itself, is a meaningless event, an event of which we could therefore not say what it is, in other words, an event without a cause or a determination.*'<sup>18</sup> Facing the dilemma of interpretation, i.e. confronted with the transformation of a meaningless event into a causal act, O'Gorman argued that, in the case of the event of the encounter between the land known today as America and Christopher Columbus, the interpretive limit was systematically exceeded. If the encounter between America and Columbus is no longer seen as an act, in order to be assumed as an event, the idea of discovery vanishes, and only the idea of invention will be able to determine a meaning for this new relationship established between two masses of land – an asymmetrical relationship from the start, since the one invents the other. The mere fact of stating that a land-mass, Europe, invented the other, America, potentially opened the possibility for that interpretation to be reversed, as it has indeed been the case in subsequent postcolonial studies and appropriations of modernity from the standpoint of periphery.

In antiquity it was assumed that the *Orbis Terrarum*, i.e. the world, consisted of three distinct entities: Europe, Asia and Africa, which also responded to a cultural hierarchy in that order<sup>19</sup>. Christianity endorsed those ideas, so that in 1492 the fourth land-mass was eventually absorbed as another part of the *Orbis Terrarum*, thus producing huge epistemological changes. The sea was no longer seen as the limit of the world, and this canceled the possibility of the existence of different worlds as assumed by ancient non-Christian cultures, the sea becoming just a kind of a lake located in between different masses of the same land-world. In O'Gorman's territorial and political system, the genuine idea of discovery as an encounter – that by not having taken place in historical chronicles only existed in his fictional system and alongside the reality of invention, involves a pluralistic conception of worlds equally related. However, in the reality of invention that relationship can only be subsidiary regarding the inventing agent. O'Gorman sustains the absolute deconstruction of the conversion of an original event without sense into an act determined by an interpretation – discovery, in this case –, and its potential replacement by an interpretative clean slate to allow the complete redefinition of the original event from new interpretations, not burdened by the past. In his own words: *In diametrical contrast to the attitude adopted by all historians, that start with an America in sight (and O'Gorman refers specifically to the Aristotelian and Ptolemaic mythologies) we start from a void, a not-yet-existing America.*<sup>20</sup>

The intellectual background of Ida Rodríguez when she met Mathias Goeritz in Altamira carried the aesthetic-political system of her tutor Edmundo O'Gorman. The imagery that she was dealing with at that time was embodied in the figure of Mathias Goeritz, whom she met personally after his path of pan-European travels full of fictional adventures taking him from Germany to Spain via Morocco, with a stop in Granada, where he briefly lived with Marianne Gast. According to Goeritz's amazing story, contradicted by archival sources only much later, he was part of *Die Brücke* (1905-1913), painted alongside Picasso, met Paul Klee in Paris and was able – surprisingly enough, given his date of birth, 1915 –, to absorb the educational experiences of the Bauhaus (1919-1933). In other words, Mathias Goeritz had already moved – in fiction – through a substantial part of the geographical imaginary of the knight-errant modern artist, only lacking a logical culmination, America and the invention of himself.

In her doctoral thesis *Amadises de América. La hazaña de Indias como empresa caballeresca* (Amadises of America. The Indies Feat as Chivalrous Company), defended in 1947, Ida Rodríguez challenged the contemporary Anglo-Saxon historiography for its excessive confidence in documentation and archival sources.<sup>21</sup> According to Ida Rodríguez, for Anglo-Saxon historical schools archival files are the only and main historical evidence.<sup>22</sup> If the aim of historical research is demonstrable truth, fiction writing – as a product of imagination, is definitely out of question and systematically ignored, even for the purpose of stylistic procedures.<sup>23</sup> Despite the preponderance of impulses and emotion over reason and judgment to determine many human acts – something that current neuroscience fully supports –, the possible effect of fictional writing about historical events rarely entered the sort of historical scientific literature Ida Rodríguez challenged.

For Ida Rodríguez, the aim was twofold: firstly to analyze the chivalrous spirit of the epic that would explain the reasons for Castile to boost the Indies enterprise; and secondly to point and show the reflection and mutual influences between chivalric fiction and the Chronicles of the Indies. Although chivalric literature was condemned by Spanish Erasmist humanists, it enjoyed an enormous popularity among all social classes with access to reading<sup>24</sup>. Gonzalo Fernández de Oviedo, Captain of the Emperor Charles V of Spain, governor of the Fortress of Santo Domingo, and the author of *Historia general y natural de las Indias* (General and Natural History of the Indies, 1526), abhorred the chivalric genre, although he himself had practiced it in a novel devoted to the knight Don Claribate in 1519. Oviedo's history, as argued by Ida Rodríguez, is full of stylistic features taken from chivalry literature, featuring the nautical explorer as a maritime errant-knight<sup>25</sup>. For its part, the chivalric literature was assimilating new characters, plots and figures from the Chronicles of Indies, such as islands, boaters and exotic tropical landscapes with their strange human and animal creatures.

In *Historia verdadera de la conquista de la Nueva España* (True History of the Conquest of New Spain, 1575), author Bernal Díaz del Castillo described himself stunned by the city of Tenochtitlan, a lattice arrangement of blocks in the water with a monumental center, straight roads, canoes and floating gardens. Given the impossibility of comparison with any other known city, Castillo used a well-known literary fantasy reference, *Amadís de Gaula*, mimicking its style and construction methods, its figures and terminology for his own historical account<sup>26</sup>. Adventurers and conquerors of the New World never stopped projecting on that land the imagery originated in their own culture, built out of the long tradition of Western stories and reports from the Atlantis of Plato onward. Despite the will of the chroniclers to descriptive objectivity, the words exposed in these *objective* chronicles were inevitably filtered through the popular fictions that most circulated at the time, chivalrous literature, to the point of acquiring a state of truth that could only be questioned much later. In all this, the only remaining truth is the fantastic, literary and fictional component of the development of the documental evidence of a series of events that occurred in unknown territories, i.e. the coalescence of fiction and reality.

On March 27, 1952 Mathias Goeritz opened his second solo exhibition in Mexico City, in the Mexican Art Gallery, directed by Inés Amor. Entitled 'Mathias Goeritz. Exhibition of paintings and sculptures', the show collected, until April 30, sample works made during his stay in Mexico: six paintings, one drawing and thirty sculptures.<sup>27</sup> It was there that Goeritz met Daniel Mont, the entrepreneur from Guadalajara who had founded the galleries Mont-Orendain in Mexico City, in 1947, and Mont, at Hamburg Street, in June 1952. On June 27 of that year, Mont and Goeritz signed the contract for the realization of *El Eco*, which included fees and budget, Ruth Rivera as the architect in charge of the technical supervision and Goeritz's commitment to make two sculptures.<sup>28</sup> The works began in September 1952 and the official opening took place on September 7 of the

following year.

In a letter to his friend Eduardo Westerdhal, the Spanish intellectual based in the Canary Islands, Goeritz mentioned that he was engaged in building a 'gallery restaurant-bar'.<sup>29</sup> Daniel Mont died suddenly from a heart attack on October 25 1953, and the financing of the exhibition project was compromised. The large mural by Rufino Tamayo intended for the wall background space was not executed, except for vague outlines for a mural painted by Jess Soto Soria, inspired by Henry Moore's drawings in February and March 1954, that would later form the basis of the facility. In January of that year Moore visited Mexico and El Eco, to which he agreed to contribute with a mural. During his visit to the house of Diego Rivera and Frida Kahlo in San Angel, built by architect Juan O'Gorman, Moore saw Mexican popular Ju-das figures of which he made the sketch that Soto Soria transferred to the wall of El Eco, thanks to photographic blow-ups executed by Marianne Gast. Daniel Mont could not see his project finished: *after the pre-opening in September 1953, it opened as a restaurant with an art gallery on February 18 1955.*<sup>30</sup> Only the small space on the top floor functioned as a gallery, and for a very short time.

Another letter from Goeritz to Westerdhal reports the pre-opening, which had a great impact in the press. In that letter Goeritz mentioned the criticism received from Alvaro Siqueiros and Diego Rivera: *Two days later, Siqueiros said in a public speech that I am a threat to modern architecture with this new Emotional (rather than functional) Architecture. He also said that we are all homosexuals, etc. Some days later, Diego Rivera gracefully insulted me for ten minutes at the Palace of Fine Arts.*<sup>31</sup>

Accused of homosexuality, Goeritz was seen as an invader of both the American space and the canonical revolutionary nationalist identity as defended by muralists. The ideology of Mexican muralism was forged in the heat of the boom coinciding with the left-revolutionary nationalism between 1925 and 1940. Some historians extend the Mexican revolutionary process from 1910 to 1940, many years beyond the Constitution approved in 1917. Lzaro Cardenas' six-year presidential term (1934-1940) was a regime of state socialism with strong nationalist leanings, with emphasis on production and domestic consumption, the empowerment of rural economy, land expropriations, and foreign investors. The two following presidential terms, that of Manuel Avila (1940-1946) and especially that of Miguel Alemán (1946-1952), witnessed the country's industrialization, its openness to international markets, and the beginning of profound changes in urban social behaviors.

The identification of the bourgeois spirit with both homosexuality and counterrevolutionary tendencies was also the subject of one of the famous polemic manifestos by Diego Rivera, called *Arte puro*. Puros maricones (Pure Art. Pure Queers), in March 1934. Rivera wrote: *'So pure art, abstract art, is the darling of the capitalist bourgeoisie in power. That is why here in Mexico there is already an emerging group of pseudo-plastics and little bourgeois scribes who, calling themselves pure poets, are in fact nothing but pure queers'*<sup>32</sup>. Siqueiros's attack against Goeritz's group of friends, including notorious homosexual dandies from Guadalajara such as Luis Barragán, Jess (Chucho) Reyes Ferreira and Daniel Mont, known as King Kong in society, was a premonitory ideological dart. The life-span of El Eco as experimental museum was very short, barely a year, after which it operated from 1955 on, and again briefly, as restaurant and nightclub devoted to the high Mexican bourgeoisie, American wealthy entrepreneurs, and the homosexual audience of the capital city. Chucho Reyes settled in Mexico City, escaping from Guadalajara, after being arrested on charges of *inverted, child molester and organizer of Saturnalia at his home, located at the crossing of Eight of July and Morelos streets.*<sup>33</sup>

In 1949 there was already a small gay cabaret in FD, called *Madreselva* (Honeysuckle), and in 1951 Daniel Mont opened the second, called The Eloínes, located opposite to the Lyric Theatre: *A cabaret enlivened by a Cuban ensemble, mixing platitudes and secrecies, under a huge painting by Carlos Mérida behind the bar. The owner,*

*Daniel Mont, King Kong, calls high society gays who, after attending the theater, the opera or the symphony, have dinner in chic-places, often wearing a smoking. They end the night at The Eloínes to rub shoulders with furs.*<sup>34</sup> In El Eco, and in front of the long bar with the abstract mural by Carlos Mérida, similar to that of The Eloínes, the most sophisticated gays of the capital paraded on the catwalk.

In 1956 Mathias Goeritz's ideogram of *El Eco* (one of the very few drawings produced for the project) was published on the cover of the American magazine *Progressive Architecture*, initiating an unstoppable presence of this building in the international media. In June 1962 the National Autonomous University of Mexico UNAM acquired the land property and management of the building, installing the University Center Theater<sup>35</sup>, later known as Elizabethan Forum, undertaking major architectural reforms. The background space became a chamber theater with a stage on the left side; an elongated body was added to the front of the building, next to the Yellow Tower, and this produced the subsequent alteration of the facade, which was wrapped with a high metal lattice. In 1972 the facade suffered a new alteration, the metal lattice was replaced by an opaque enclosure in light blue, and the Yellow Tower was painted in gray, as shown in the photographs.

In September 1983, a press release recounted the controversies among building occupants and the Society for the Artistic Treasures of Mexico, which had denounced the two resident associations of *El Eco* since 1968: CLETA (Free Expression Center for Theatre and Arts) and Tecolote Cultural Center<sup>36</sup>. The report provided by CLETA in response to the aforesaid press release mentioned that the closure of El Eco as a restaurant-cabaret was due to a 'fight' that ended in a murder, without giving the particular date of the event, and that the building was closed for a while with the resulting deterioration caused by abandonment. The author of the text was Luis Cisneros, who is still leading CLETA today, though at another venue. Cisneros wrote: *[El Eco] was a luxury theater which cost many millions to the UNAM. Among other things, the unilateral assignment of budget generated discontent that led to the seizure of the Elizabethan Forum by a group of students from the Faculty of Arts, beginning the controversial movement CLETA.* The year of the assault by CLETA was 1968, coinciding with the student massacre in the Plaza of the Three Cultures in Tlatelolco on October 2, and the celebration of the Olympic Games in Mexico, for which Mathias Goeritz devised the so called *Route of friendship*: a series of large-scale urban sculptures installed by an international team of sculptors in a section of the ring-motorway, in the outskirts of the University Campus.

CLETA report concludes that: *The Experimental Museum El Eco does no longer exist as it was conceived by Mathias Goeritz, but we believe that if the artist knew about the history of what was born and developed here over the last ten years, he would agree with us that his architectural experiment has reached, in a lively dynamic way, the goal of 'producing [and reproducing] human emotions through a modern concept, and without falling prey to an empty and theatrical decorativism'*<sup>37</sup>, quoting a phrase (in italics) from Goeritz's Manifesto of Emotional Architecture.

*El Eco* was completely rebuilt in 2005 and its original use as an Experimental Museum was restored, forever closing the circle of official modern architecture in Mexico. The Mexican modernization – of which Goeritz was one of the main protagonists –, was a dream, sometimes forged by the hand of biographical events. It was crossed by tragic and even bloody events that, like the tales of chivalry and Chronicles of Indies, render fiction indistinguishable from reality.

●○

EMPATHY  
GESAMKUNSTWERK  
FABLE  
BIOGRAPHY  
AMÉRICA