

The glow of an epilogue: Two works from Alberto's late period



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**BILBOKO ARTE
EDERREN MUSEOA
MUSEO DE BELLAS
ARTES DE BILBAO**

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Wood sculpture *Untitled (Woman with Locust)* [fig. 1] and the large gouache on paper *Figures with Landscape* [fig. 2], both from around 1960-1962, are the two works by Alberto in the Bilbao Fine Arts Museum collection. Arriving in 1981 and 1972, respectively, they are particularly significant works in the artist's career, as they eloquently point up the maturity curve of his art.

The life and art of Alberto

Alberto Sánchez Pérez (Toledo, 1895-Moscow, 1962) was a leading 20th-century Spanish sculptor, both in terms of the avant-garde art produced in Spain until the end of the Civil War, and the work Spanish artists did in exile from then on. Much has been written and published in recent decades about him and his work, and there have been plenty of exhibitions with Alberto and his work featuring centre stage¹.

From humble beginnings and with no academic education to speak of, Alberto spent much of his childhood in Toledo working in agriculture, also doing a stint in a blacksmith's². In 1907 he moved to Madrid, where he became an apprentice in a sculpture casting workshop, although he soon left to become a baker. Despite all the usual factors affecting someone from his social class, from early childhood Alberto's vocation drove him towards activities indissolubly linked to artistic creation³. And both his proximity to popular images and rural scenes and the skill he acquired at the forge or the demiurge-like experience of modelling dough in the bakery with his hands would become tools for shaping his creative impulses.

Alberto received some education at a House of the People in Madrid, where he was taught by a socialist militant, and soon began his first incursions in drawing and modelling. Around 1915, along with Francisco

1 Some of the more interesting secondary sources from the many articles, books, exhibition catalogues and academic essays discussing Alberto's career and works include: Martín 1964 (first essay on Alberto, published in Hungary in Spanish, widely distributed in Spain), Bozal 1965, Madrid 1970 (catalogue of the first exhibition of Alberto's work in Spain after the Civil War), Litoral 1971, Robles Vizcaíno 1974, Alberto 1975 (includes an extensive selection of writings by Alberto from different periods of his career), Azcoaga 1977, Brihuega 1980, Gómez Cedillo 1992, Toledo 1995, Madrid/Bilbao 1995, Bilbao 1997, Madrid 1999, Madrid/Toledo/Barcelona 2001 and Alicante 2011 (besides looking at the repercussions of the Vallecas aesthetic on the visual arts, the latter also examines his close links with literature). The most complete of all is Madrid/Toledo/Barcelona 2001, which includes the curators' essays with others by Juan Manuel Bonet, Valeriano Bozal, Eugenio Carmona, Robert S. Lubar, Javier Pérez Segura and Alfonso Gómez Cedillo, plus a report by the restoration team from the Queen Sofia National Museum Art Centre (MNCARS) on the physical nature of Alberto's works and how he went about producing them.

2 As a boy, Alberto worked in Toledo as a swineherd and a cartwright's assistant. When an apprentice at the blacksmith's, he contracted an eye infection and he moved to Madrid, where his family had already settled following the closure of the family business.

3 Francisco Mateos tells of projects that sprang from the young Alberto's vivid and fertile imagination. In one premonitory fantasy, he imagined a fountain of twinkling metals, wrought into a kind of lattice-work, in the spaces of which birds took refuge. Men stopped to admire and oxen drank at the fountain (Mateos 1926).



1. Alberto Sánchez (1895-1962)
Untitled or Woman with Locust, c. 1960-1962
Wood, 76.7 x 30 x 39 cm
Bilbao Fine Arts Museum
Inv. no. 82/339

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2. Alberto Sánchez (1895-1962)
Figures with Landscape, c. 1960-1962
Gouache on paper, 152 x 300 cm
Bilbao Fine Arts Museum
Inv. no. 82/338

Mateos, he became interested in the social function of art, a matter that prompted both budding artists to imagine revolutionary utopian projects, associated with the first reports of avant-garde movements elsewhere in Europe⁴. Direct contact with the works of Diego Rivera and María Blanchard on display at the *Exhibition of the Complete Painters*, held in Madrid in 1915 on the initiative of Ramón Gómez de la Serna proved a decisive factor in their move towards avant-garde forms⁵. However, Alberto's military service in Melilla separated him for a while from these two young artists.

From 1922, his friendship with painter Rafael Barradas would also turn out to be crucial. The Uruguayan artist gave Alberto first-hand knowledge of the avant-garde movements in Milan, Paris, Barcelona and Madrid. Noting Alberto's political concerns, Barradas, at that time at the forefront of the Madrid avant-garde, began to talk of the social implications of the "vibrationist" and "clownist" art that had informed his painting until then⁶. Barradas also put Alberto in direct contact with intellectuals, writers and artists (people like Federico García Lorca, Gabriel García Maroto, Manuel Abril, the caricaturist Garrán, Maruja Mallo, Rafael Cansinos Assens, Ángel Ferrant and Salvador Dalí) who were shaping the avant-garde movement in Madrid at that time⁷.

Alberto made his debut on the larger stage of Spanish art at the 1925 *Exhibition of the Society of Iberian Artists* (ESAI) presented at the Madrid's Retiro palaces. This was a key event in the process of modernizing the country's art, as many of the artists involved first caught the public's eye here, before going on to become major figures: Dalí, Palencia, Cossío, Maroto, Peinado, Ucelay, Moreno Villa, Sáenz de Tejada, Bores, Guezala, Pelegrín, Ferrant and other young artists on the trail of the modern, who had the opportunity of sharing wall space with established artists like Barradas himself, Arteta, Piñole, Pichot, Solana and Echevarría⁸. Apart from social realism⁹, the drawings and sculptures Alberto showed for the first time at that exhibition already contained Cubist and Futurist elements, as is clear from *The Blind Man with the Lute* [fig. 3], *Basque Cartwright* (Queen Sofia National Museum Art Centre - MNCARS, Madrid) and *María de Padilla* [fig. 4], all executed between 1923 and 1925. But at the same time these works connected with the new sensibilities coalescing in the "return to order" dominant in Europe and just taking hold in Spain. *Countrywoman*, from 1923-1925 (MNCARS, Madrid) provides a good example of this ability to connect with the new direction.

Between 1926 and 1928 Alberto received a grant from the Provincial Council of Toledo. The money allowed him to work more, to fine-tune his Cubist- and Futurist-inspired visual idiom¹⁰ and to take part in an important exhibition in Madrid¹¹. Despite the welcome funds, his fragile economic position did not really improve for some years, until he had staged a number of exhibitions and become a leading light in the circles working to renew art in Madrid. Obtaining a post as drawing teacher in a secondary school at El Escorial in 1933 was also a great help.

4 Both imagined a House of the People conceived in what might almost be Futurist architecture (Ibid.). Around that time, Alberto and Mateos apparently travelled to Portugal.

5 For everything about the avant-garde in Madrid prior to 1925, cf. García García 2005.

6 "Vibrationism" and "clownism" were names coined by Barradas for the painting he did between 1917 and 1922. Barradas called the idiom he used after sharing his artistic preoccupations with Alberto "paperboard vision".

7 These contacts enabled Alberto to begin publishing his drawings in avant-garde journals like the *Alfar* in A Coruña and *Ronsel* in Lugo.

8 Cf. the catalogue for the ESAI commemorative exhibition (Madrid/Bilbao 1995).

9 Although not exhibited at Iberian Artists, an eloquent example of this social realism is the watercolour entitled *The Yard*, 1925-1926 (private collection).

10 In 1929 or thereabouts, the earliest biomorphic features began to appear in this Cubist-cum-Futurist idiom, together with a visual vocabulary of a strongly signic nature not entirely remote from the one being used in Paris by Spanish artists of the lyrical figuration movement.

11 Alberto was the only artist to take part in the *Exhibition of Paintings and Sculptures by Spaniards Resident in Paris* without actually having been to Paris. Organized by the Society for Courses & Lectures, the exhibition was mounted in the Botanical Gardens in Madrid in March 1929.



3. Alberto Sánchez (1895-1962)
The Blind Man with the Lute, 1923-1925
Plaster with polychrome, 51 x 14 x 13 cm
Museo Nacional Centro de Arte
Reina Sofía, Madrid
Inv. no. AD01812



4. Alberto Sánchez (1895-1962)
María de Padilla, 1923-1925
Plaster with polychrome, 92.3 x 39 x 33 cm
IVAM, Institut Valencià d'Art Modern,
Regional Government of Valencia



5. Alberto Sánchez (1895-1962)
 Sketch for the scenery for *Numancia*, 1936
 Watercolour on paper, 54.5 x 73.5 cm
 Banco Santander Collection

Months before the proclamation of the Second Republic, Alberto had launched, together with painter Benjamín Palencia, from Albacete, and sculptor Pancho Lasso, from the Canaries, what we know today as the School of Vallecas, the true poetic focus of his aesthetics¹².

From the beginning of this legendary Vallecas “school” up to the outbreak of the Civil War, many artists, writers and intellectuals from all over Spain came to share its poetic focus and what could almost be described as initiation experiences. The roster included Maruja Mallo, Manuel Díaz Caneja, Antonio Rodríguez Luna, Eduardo Díaz Yepes, Antonio Ballester, Nicolás de Lekuona, Francisco Mateos, Jorge Oteiza, Miguel Hernández, Rafael Alberti, Gil Bel, Luis Felipe Vivanco, José Herrera Petere and Federico García Lorca (possibly Moreno Villa too). Two major Spanish-American poets, Pablo Neruda and Raúl González Tuñón, also heeded the call of the Vallecas school. Some of the prime movers in Republican Spain’s resplendent arts and cultural scene were attracted to the Vallecas movement, which obviously did Alberto’s career and reputation no harm at all. Besides a large group of paintings and sculptures by the artists involved, they and the writers who shared the experience produced manifesto-style and literary texts inspired by what we might term the Vallecas Poetics¹³. A paradigmatic example of this production is a note written by Alberto, “*Words of a Sculptor*”, which had the impact of a genuine manifesto¹⁴.

Alberto’s Vallecas work would be shown in a number of exhibitions held in Spain until the outbreak of the Civil War¹⁵. One shouldn’t forget either that several curtains by Alberto done in the Vallecas visual idiom

12 The name Vallecas School was never actually used in the 1930s. Alberto coined it in an autobiographical essay written in Moscow in the summer of 1960 and later published in Valencia (Alberto 1975). The name has been used frequently by later historians. Nevertheless, the phrase Vallecas Poetics gradually became accepted and established.

13 Much has been written about the Vallecas School. The most complete recent publication on the subject is the exhibition catalogue Alicante 2011. The catalogue includes all the writings inspired by the Vallecas experience, either by Alberto and Palencia or by the other artists and writers who also participated.

14 Alberto 1933.

15 Alberto exhibited with Benjamín Palencia in the Madrid Athenaeum in June 1931. In October that year at the same venue he staged a one-man show. In June 1933 he joined the Constructive Group at Madrid’s Autumn Show and in April 1936 he had another one-man show at the Madrid premises of the ADLAN (Friends of the New Arts).

framed plays staged by Lorca's travelling theatre La Barraca¹⁶, and other theatre shows premiered in cities around the country [fig. 5]¹⁷. In 1933, Alberto and other Vallecás regulars (Maruja Mallo, Benjamín Palencia, Eduardo Díaz Yepes, Francisco Mateos, Antonio Rodríguez Luna and José Moreno Villa) also showcased their aesthetic in the activities of the Constructive Art Artists' Group, organized by Torres García during his brief return to Spain.

Long group walks on the outskirts of Madrid or around the countryside of Guadalajara and Toledo in search of inspiration were a major factor in forging Alberto's Vallecás aesthetic. Witness to these moments of poetic fusion with nature, or even with the margins of the city or the dunghill, were paintings and sculptures that shuffled earthy, rural, traditional, popular or plain slummy images shot through with the artists' urge to be modern. Such forms were expressed in a biomorphic idiom bordering on the kind of language used by Surrealists like Tanguy and Dalí; it was also in line with the poetic imagery Miró used in the early 1920s and was more than capable of living alongside developments in the vanguard of international sculpture, in the work produced at the time by Brancusi, Arp and Henry Moore. Above all it was on a par with Picasso's late-1920s projects in sculpture featured in avant-garde journals.

Most of Alberto's Vallecás works disappeared during the Civil War and all that remains of them are photographs. But the surviving sculptures, drawings and watercolours¹⁸ show with persuasive physical force the quasi-Pantheistic urge that inspired all of Alberto's other work. They are the expression of nature understood both as a sort of intimate distinguishing feature and a threshold opening on to the infinite; an infinity that is within hand's reach and supportive of the present, where the zoological, vegetable and geological seem to interweave in an endless loop of essential tensions and a kind of orogenic memory. And yet these works are tangible evidence offered to the human race of the possibility of a form of poetic being. This is where the really revolutionary facet of Alberto's work was thought to be found and where it is still held to reside today.

To the extent that part of his drawings, sculptures and theatre scenery designs had little to do with the tenets of social and political realism then underlying left-wing alternatives in art, Alberto found himself involved in a famous debate with Josep Renau and Antonio Rodríguez Luna. Held in 1935 in the pages of the Valencia-based journal *New Culture*, the discussion was about what sort of wrapping the formal nature of politically committed art should come in¹⁹. Although all three were on the same ideological side, Renau and Luna reproached Alberto for his tendency towards abstract forms. However, Alberto, clearly at one with the ideals and strategies of his fellow debaters, had already produced, and would continue to produce, works of social realism and even corrosive political satire, as drawings of his published in *October* and in *New Culture* demonstrated.

16 A good number of sketches, made between 1933 and 1936 for the scenery and extras of Lope de Vega's classic play *Fuenteovejuna*, survive in several private collections. The play was staged by La Barraca around Spain.

17 Also done in the Vallecás idiom was the scenery for *The Procession of the Cuckolds*, (1933, MNCARS), staged in Madrid by the company run by Ignacio Sánchez Mejías and the dancer and choreographer known as La Argentinita, which have survived completely intact. Also surviving are sketches for the scenery for *Numancia* by Cervantes (1936, Banco Santander Collection), staged in Valencia, the scenery for *The Guilds of Valencia* by Altolaguirre and Bergamín, staged in Valencia in 1937, known only from photographs, and the scenery for another *Fuenteovejuna* (1937, private collection) planned for Paris although never premiered.

18 Only four genuine Vallecás sculptures from the 1930s survive (two in the MNCARS, one in a private collection and the other in the MACBA in Barcelona), although we know from several documentary sources that he produced a further fifteen. Of his two-dimensional works, some twenty drawings and watercolours are in private and public collections, although we have documentary evidence of another twelve.

19 The entire debate was reproduced in the catalogue of the great MNCARS anthological exhibition (Madrid/Toledo/Barcelona 2001, pp. 411, 435-443).

In 1932 and 1933, Alberto's Vallecás idiom made an appearance in Copenhagen and Berlin, where he had been invited to take part in exhibitions organized by the revived Society of Iberian Artists, a modernizing platform to which the Republican government gave its (de facto) support²⁰. But his most memorable international presentation came in Paris, at the 1937 *Exposition Internationale des Arts et Techniques dans la Vie Moderne*.

With the Civil War in full swing, the Spanish participation in this international exhibition was closely monitored by nations that would soon themselves be locked in a far bigger, and far more ferocious conflict. The visual language of Vallecás at its purest informed *The Spanish People Is on a Path that Leads to a Star* [fig. 6], the huge, totemic sculpture installed at the entrance to the Spanish Pavilion²¹. Designed by Josep Maria Sert and Luis Lacasa, the pavilion was decorated with the changing political photo-montages of Renau, then the republican government's general director for the Fine Arts. Also on display inside the small, functional building (itself an authentic agitprop machine) were major works like Picasso's *Guernica*, Miró's *The Anti-Fascist Peasant Farmer and the Social Revolution*, Calder's *Mercury Fountain* and Julio González's *Montserrat*, also expressly conceived for the occasion. In a regularly rotated exhibition, a huge number of works appeared by all the artists loyal to the Republican cause. For this building Alberto used Vallecás-style forms in the shelves he designed for the popular arts section²².

In September 1938, Alberto, his wife Clara Sancha and son Alcaén moved to the Soviet Union. Alberto went as a teacher for the Spanish children evacuated there. Thus began what might be termed a transplantation that would last until the sculptor's death in 1962²³.

After settling originally in Moscow, the events of World War 2, which had turned much Soviet territory into a huge battlefield, obliged the family to live in the Soviet Republic of Bashkiria between 1941 and 1943. In late 1943 they were able to return definitively to Moscow.

At the beginning of exile, Alberto worked principally as a scenery painter²⁴, also producing figurative still-life paintings not too far removed from the international current of magic realism that had been a part of modern painting in the period between the wars [fig. 7]²⁵. However, he temporarily gave up work as a sculptor, as the abstract language expressed in his forms did not fit in with the official guidelines for Soviet art.

This renunciation or, more accurately, "abstention", was not the mere result of censorship, as Alberto was happy to use an idiom not in contradiction with what was known as socialist realism²⁶. Even so, following the death of Stalin and, above all, the symptoms of a thaw in 1956 (in the aftermath of the 20th CPSU Congress), the artist took up sculpting again, gradually resuscitating the forms through which he had expressed his Vallecás vision during the Second Republic.

20 The most complete review of the Society of Iberian Artists during the Republic is to be found in Pérez Segura 2002.

21 To mark the anthological exhibition on Alberto at the MNCARS (Madrid/Toledo/Barcelona 2001), the artist Jorge Ballester produced a 1:1 scale reproduction (13 metres high) of Alberto's monolith (the present whereabouts of the original being unknown) which was put up opposite the Museum façade. It is still there today. Ballester worked from the original mock-up now in the MNCARS, together with several contemporary photographs taken by Dora Maar and other reporters. Shortly after the exhibition, a small cedar-wood model that Alberto had presented to Miró in Paris appeared. This mock-up is now in a private collection.

22 The most complete study of the Spanish Pavilion at the 1937 Paris Universal Exhibition is still the catalogue of the MNCARS commemorative exhibition curated by Josefina Alix (Madrid 1987).

23 The most detailed and complete review of Alberto's life and career in the Soviet Union is Concha Lomba's essay in the catalogue of the MNCARS anthological: Madrid/Toledo/Barcelona 2001, pp. 73-112.

24 Alberto's abundant stage scenery work in the Soviet Union is still under the microscope. He worked for the Kamerni Theatre, the Theatre of Miniatures, the Gypsy Theatre, the Children's Theatre, the Ossoaviain Theatre and also the Mayakovsky Theatre.

25 Seven of these still-life paintings and two self-portraits were displayed in the MNCARS anthological (Madrid/Toledo/Barcelona 2001). Their modern realism has links with the kind of work produced in a number of European movements in the thirties, and has awakened critical interest that until recently had been submerged by his supposed "renunciation of the avant-garde idiom".

26 Alberto's son Alcaén has on numerous occasions confirmed this interpretation of the shift in his production towards realism.



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6. Alberto Sánchez (1895-1962)
Mock-up of *The Spanish People Is on a Path that Leads to a Star*, 1937
Polished black plaster, 184.5 x 32 x 33 cm
Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía, Madrid
Inv. no. AS11424



7. Alberto Sánchez (1895-1962)
Still Life, 1949-1954
Oil on canvas, 50.7 x 62.5 cm
Private collection

In those years, Rafael Alberti, Juan Rejano, Pablo Neruda, Louis Aragon, Pyotr Konchalovsky and a host of other intellectuals and artists visited Alberto at his Moscow home, a small flat decorated with Spanish-inspired furniture and imitation tiles he had made up and painted. Though modest, the flat was a much more decorous place than the other homes the sculptor and his family had previously known, as Alberto's son Alcaén has since insisted. In 1957 Alberto visited Peking accompanied by Luis Lacasa.

In 1956 and 1957 Alberto produced twenty or so sculptures and worked as an adviser on Kózzintsev's film *Don Quixote*²⁷; from 1958 to 1960 he produced a further dozen sculptures [figs. 8 and 9]; and finally, between 1960 and his death in 1962, another ten²⁸. In all of them the forms he developed during the Vallecas phase are appreciable, now hybridizing with others from the new natural, anthropological context Alberto was then moving in. At the same time he produced other two-dimensional works in which this Vallecas visual idiom (also rooted, understandably enough, in the Russian landscape) expresses places, figures and projects for monuments that complement the imagery deployed in his sculptures.

Airbrushed out of Spain's historic memory by the Franco regime after the Civil War, interest in Alberto and his work was reawakened in the mid-1960s²⁹. He more or less recovered his status as an artist after the anthological exhibition held at the Spanish Museum of Contemporary Art in May 1970³⁰. Today he is unanimously acclaimed as a benchmark figure for any reasoned overview of Spanish art in the first half of the 20th century.

27 His work with the Soviet filmmaker and the persistence in his Russian work of what he had done in Spain were the central themes of another one-man Alberto exhibition: Albacete/Córdoba 2005.

28 Almost all these works were included in the MNCARS anthological: Madrid/Toledo/Barcelona 2001, pp. 108-331.

29 In what were the earliest rigorous exhumations of the art of that period, Valeriano Bozal gave Alberto a fundamental role: Bozal 1965, Bozal 1967.

30 Madrid 1970. Alberto definitively secured his place in accounts of 20th century Spanish art after the anthological exhibition at the Bilbao Fine Arts Museum (Bilbao 1997) and, above all, after the MNCARS anthological referred to *passim* (Madrid/Toledo/Barcelona 2001).

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8. Alberto Sánchez (1895-1962)
Caucasus Partridge, 1957-1958
Wood with polychrome. 44 x 13 x 32.5 cm
Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía, Madrid
Inv. no. AS08112

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9. Alberto Sánchez (1895-1962)
Bull and Landscape, 1959
Wood, metal and iron, all with polychrome, 57.5 x 29.5 x 28 cm
MACBA Collection. MACBA Foundation, Barcelona
Inv. no. 0042

Alberto at the Bilbao Fine Arts Museum

The two works by Alberto in the Bilbao Fine Arts Museum collection were produced in the last two years of his life. The dates given (between 1960 and 1962) constitute a rigorous, reliable chronological parameter backed by Alcaén Sánchez Sancha, the artist's only child, who actually saw these works being executed when he was a young boy. Regarding Alberto's work as a sculptor during the exile, Alcaén also has photographs that allow us to date the group of three-dimensional sculptures Alberto made in the Soviet Union in the three periods I mentioned³¹.

Woman with Locust

This untitled work, unofficially known as *Woman with Locust*, is another variation on maternity, a constant theme in Alberto's sculpture. It also conjures up the totem image of monumental structures based on figures conceived on vertical axes. These are all standard features in the artist's career.

Motherhood appears early on in Alberto's work, and is particularly appreciable in some especially significant examples. We know, for instance, that in the 1925 Iberian Artists exhibition, there was a *Maternity* based on constructive planes³². Contemporary press cuttings illustrate the basic sketch for his *Monument to the Children* (1929), submitted to the 1930 National Sculpture Competition, in which the central figure is a motherhood figure, clearly couched for the first time in the biomorphic idiom that rapidly spread to inform his entire Vallecas production. The motherhood sculpted from this monument with a point puncher on Novelda limestone in 1933 is now part of the MNCARS collection [fig. 10]. The woman with child theme reappears in sculptures done in the Soviet Union, as it also does in a more explicit work done between 1958 and 1960³³. Absolutely central to Alberto's whole oeuvre, the female figure is invested with a range of symbolic meanings, featuring as mother, lover and Spanish countrywoman. In the Bilbao Fine Arts Museum sculpture, the notion of maternity is expressed in the small child-like being perched on the mother figure's right arm, which is in turn echoed and invigorated by the other, slightly larger figure to the left of the central one.

Understood metaphorically as a "vertical aggregation or development of objects, beings or forms", the totem clearly found its paradigmatic expression in *The Spanish People Is on a Path that Leads to a Star* monolith (1937). But it had appeared regularly in Alberto's work during the preceding decade. By way of example, one may point to forms in *Monument to the Children*, in his projects for monumental fountains outlined between 1929 and 1931³⁴, in the sculpture *Gesture of a Country Woman, on a Road, in the Rain* (1931-1932) [fig. 11] or the continuous presence of totemic features in the sketches for stage scenery that Alberto produced until his exile. Totem forms frequently reappear in the work he produced in his Russian period; they are appreciable in the oil painting *Russian Landscape* (c. 1947, private collection) and in sculptures like *Signpost for the River Belaya* (1958-1959) [fig. 12], *Clamour of Larks* (1958-1969) [fig. 13], *The Hunter of Roots* (1960-1962, Patio Herreriano Museum, Valladolid) and *The Cock and the Hen* (1960-1962, MNCARS). These are just the most eloquent sculptural examples, as these vertical aggregations also crop up regularly in his two-dimensional works.

31 1956-1957, 1958-1960 and 1960-1962. There are also a few works done previously (between 1949 and 1956). For example, *Miguel Hernández, The Author of Detective Novels, The Dog and the Monkey* and *The Message Bird* (all in private collections).

32 Present whereabouts unknown, although reproduced in the press of the day and in Madrid/Toledo/Barcelona 2001, p. 31.

33 I refer to the *Motherhood* (private collection) reproduced in Madrid/Toledo/Barcelona 2001, p. 310.

34 Like the three in a private collection reproduced in Madrid/Toledo/Barcelona 2001, pp. 224 and 225.



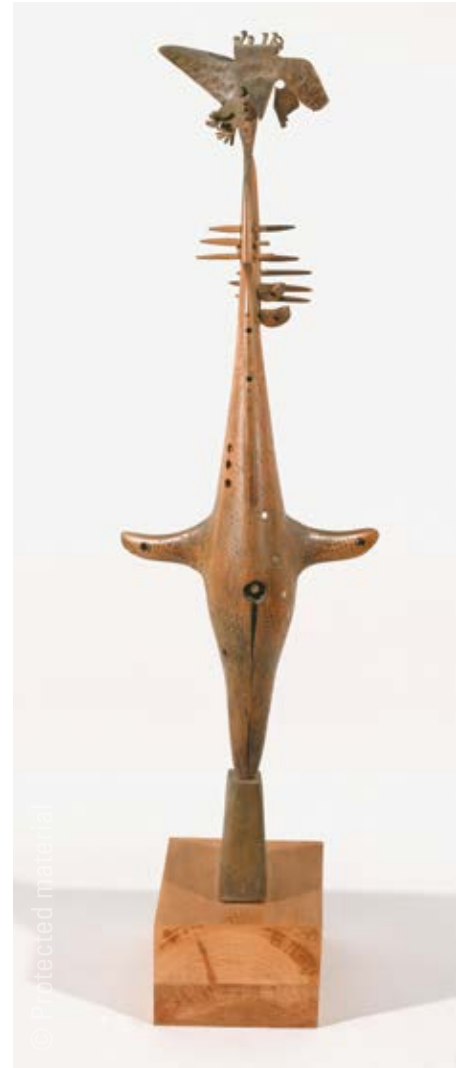
10. Alberto Sánchez (1895-1962)
Maternity, 1929-1933
Novelda stone, 90.5 x 21.5 x 14 cm
Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía, Madrid
Inv. no. AS00625



11. Alberto Sánchez (1895-1962)
Gesture of a Country Woman, on a Road, in the Rain, 1931-1932
Plaster with polychrome, 69.3 x 20 x 10 cm
MACBA Collection. MACBA Foundation, Barcelona
Inv. no. 0043



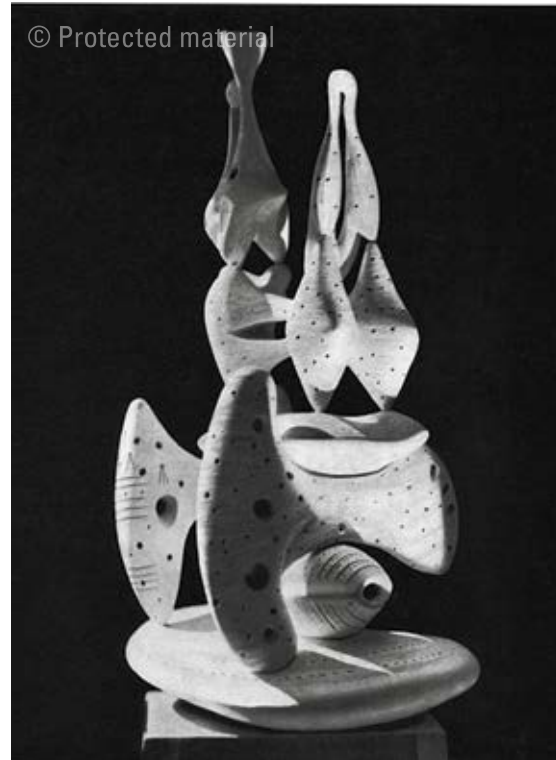
12. Alberto Sánchez (1895-1962)
Signpost for the River Belaya, 1958-1959
 Wood, bamboo, copper wire and modelling clay, 93.5 x 54 x 18 cm
 Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía, Madrid
 Inv. no. AS11391



13. Alberto Sánchez (1895-1962)
Clamour of Larks, 1958-1960
 Oak and iron plate, 92.5 x 29 x 18 cm
 Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía, Madrid
 Inv. no. AS11392



14. Alberto Sánchez (1895-1962)
Study for Sculpture Ends, 1960-1962
 Pencil on paper, 37.5 x 28.5 cm
 C.A.C.-Museo Patio Herreriano, Valladolid



15. Alberto Sánchez (1895-1962)
Monument to the Birds, 1931-1932
 Present whereabouts unknown

In *Woman with Locust* the totemic structure is quite clear, the work being an explicit, physical vertical aggregation of forms fragmentarily suggestive of larks, horns or birds and, above all, of the “locust” on the head from which the unofficial name for the sculpture derives [fig. 14].

This monumental structure built around figures conceived in vertical axes is there to see in *Woman with Locust*, particularly in the uprising lines formed by the three beings the sculpture seems to evoke in the synthetic figurative schemas of a woman and two children. Even so, the horizontal “locust” segment caps and neutralizes the verticality that surges from the base and informs the figures as they rise. Previous manifestations of this formula are by no means scarce and can be found in the sketch for the *Monument to the Children*, which provided the mould for most of the forms Alberto used from then on. They reappear in the essential *Monument to the Birds* (1931-1932) [fig. 15]³⁵, in the projects for monumental fountains from 1929-1931³⁶, and, in particular, in the works of exile, best exemplified in the *Project for a Monument to Peace* (1960-1962) [fig. 16]. Curiously, compositions featuring just two main forms (which in some ways are also appreciable in the work under discussion here, as the form of the smaller child merges easily, in visual terms, into the woman’s form) are much more frequent in Alberto’s oeuvre.

Our perception of the actual carpentry work is also important to *Woman with Locust*. Here the wood can almost be smelled, and the sound of the wood under the plane moving across it reaches out to the senses to awaken impressions long anchored in the memory.

35 Present whereabouts unknown, reproduced in Martin 1964, p. 13, and in Madrid/Toledo/Barcelona 2001, p. 62.

36 Cf. note 37.



16. Alberto Sánchez (1895-1962)
Project for a Monument to Peace, 1960-1962
Wood, 137 x 65 x 40 cm
C.A.C.-Museo Patio Herreriano, Valladolid



17. Alberto Sánchez (1895-1962)
Dancer (High Relief with the Figure of a Woman), 1927-1929
Plaster with polychrome, 100 x 40 x 21.5 cm
Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía, Madrid
Inv. no. AS11422

Also of importance to the work are the abundant round holes, which remit to the signic vocabulary Alberto used from the late 1920s on (one of the earliest appearances of this vocabulary comes in *Dancer (High Relief with the Figure of a Woman)*, from 1927-1929 [fig. 17] and which is repeated in his Vallecas production). Some of these holes are associated with those in Picasso's synthetic Cubism, with the holes Max Ernst painted in his Surrealist period and the holes Dalí repeated endlessly in his paintings prior to 1929.

One last striking detail in *Woman with Locust* is the pedestal. This is a base of geometrical bodies that once again seems to refer to the pedestals of the sculptures Alberto presented at the 1925 Iberian Artists exhibition³⁷.

37 Reproduced in Madrid/Toledo/Barcelona 2001, pp. 31, 194-199.

Figures with Landscape

The title of this large gouache alludes to the two most repeated features in Alberto's iconography during his exile and, in a way, throughout his entire career: figure and landscape [figs. 18-20].

Works of this size are infrequent in Alberto's two-dimensional work, owing to the artist's chronic lack of financial resources and space. It does however reflect a permanent aspiration in the artist's creative endeavour, which was that any of his sculptures could act as the germ or seed for a monumental work capable of creating a dialogue with the real scale of nature. Or that every two-dimensional work of his should have the potential to achieve a size sufficient to "physically abduct" anyone looking at it; this was what usually happened in plays staged with his scenery and settings. Even when just an aspiration, scale in his work means the vehicle through which the artist achieves an almost physical fusion of art and life. A fusion accomplished, not in the field of imaged communication, an urge appreciable in any and all of Alberto's works, but as a direct result of an aesthetic experience established in the physical promiscuity between spectator and work of art.

It would be fair to say that, in the size and thematic repertoire of this huge gouache, *Figures with Landscape* is a genuine paradigm of Alberto's poetics.

The landscape portrayed in this work requires an unavoidable exercise of memory. The return to an Ithaca that Alberto, like the Odysseus who knows his ship is coming into its definitive port, once again identifies with the primitive, the original Vallecas landscape. The hills and mounds dotted about the steppe figure as



18. Alberto Sánchez (1895-1962)
Cosmic Drawing, 1958-1960
Watercolour on paper, 58 x 60 cm
Banco Santander Collection



19. Alberto Sánchez (1895-1962)
Countrywoman Dancing, 1958-1960
 Indian ink and watercolour on paper, 56 x 39.5 cm
 ICO Collections, Madrid
 Inv. no. 5082



20. Alberto Sánchez (1895-1962)
Three Women Out for a Walk, 1956-1958
 Tempera and Indian ink on paper, 63 x 45 cm
 ICO Collections, Madrid
 Inv. no. 5082

sacred landmarks, like Almodóvar hill in Vallecas where he founded his poetics at the coming of the Second Republic. The deep lines that cut across the landscape and the crops evoke an agricultural reality he had known on the land around Toledo. Rivers flanked by sparse, famished vegetation run through the plain, with bends and contours similar to the ones that tattoo the steppe of New Castile. Bends similar to the ones Alberto saw on the road to the east coast when he was evacuated during the Civil War. Debarked trees like the ones Alberto evoked in his writings, which occasionally lifted their branches as they metamorphose like thirsty Daphnes that history is rapidly de-rooting. All these elements fit together in a kind of loop which eventually transforms into a centrifugal coil:

Toledo images -> Vallecas -> Castile -> East Coast -> Russia ->
 -> The infinite ->
 -> Russia -> East Coast -> Castile -> Vallecas -> Toledo images

And the figures in the gouache simply take up the itinerary the landscape offers them, while they recapitulate a thematic repertoire that runs like a thread through Alberto's work. A bull in the foreground deconstructs into a sort of red geometry when placed in the middle distance. The women on the right, handled with a relative degree of mimesis, abstract their features on the left hand side, metamorphosing into trees, gypsy awnings or remote island monuments that hold scarves up to the symbolic stage-set that is the landscape. Or they might be seen as natural totems waving a red flag that emerges from a heart in offertory. Or as a sinuous biomorphic oval shape holding a bale, while exhibiting hollows that from the interior of its cloak hint at a face, a claw-hand, an enormous heart or a woman's sex open to the horizon like an archer's loophole in a castle wall.

Figures with Landscape is, then, a genuine *summa* and a kind of epilogue. A resounding finale which, in the last stages of a creative journey, recapitulates, like the closing bars of a symphony, the aesthetic terrain covered on that long and arduous adventure.

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