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COVER ARTIST: **RAMON ENRICH**

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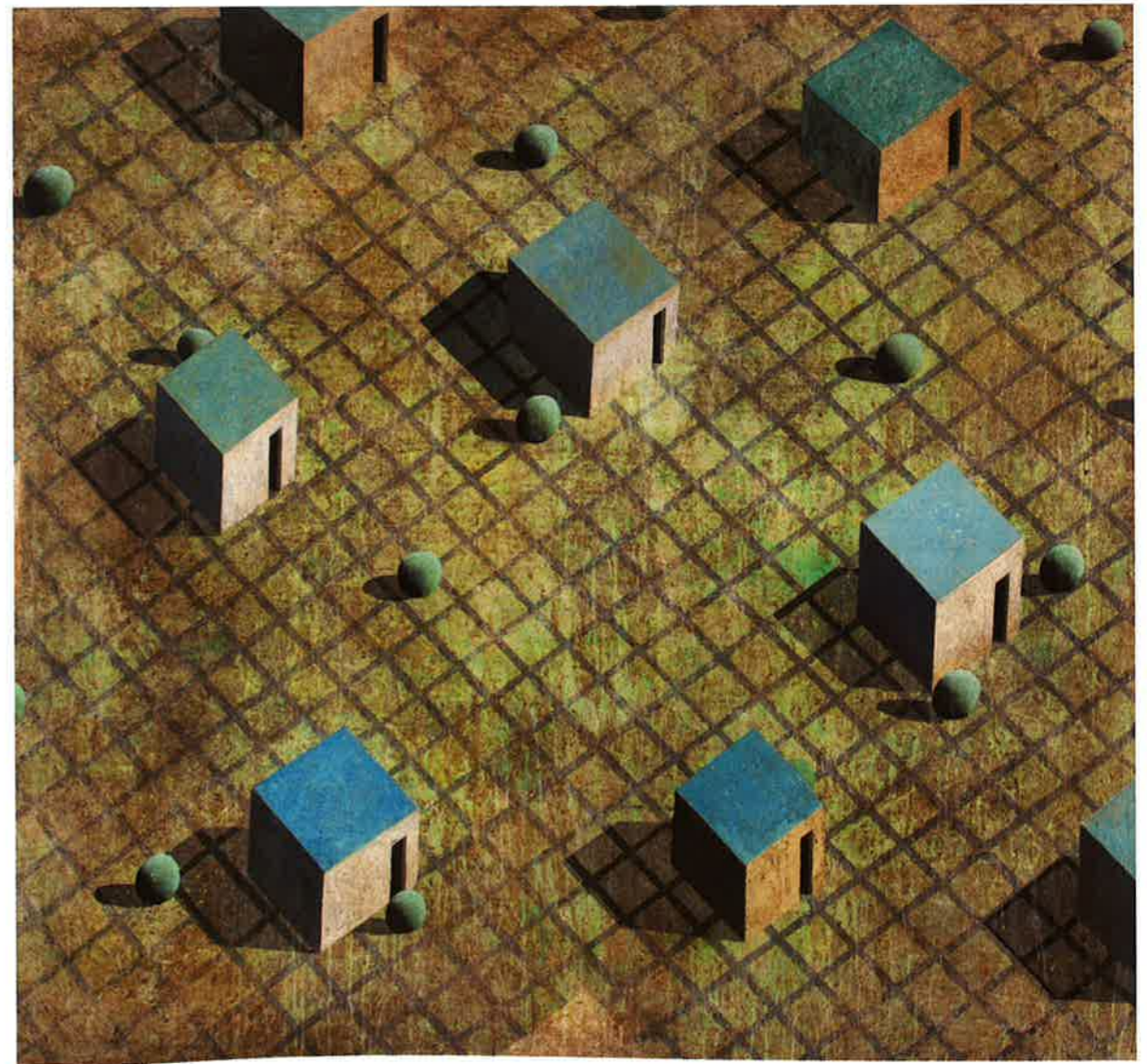
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A SOMERSAULT ON A PEDESTAL

by Julià Guillamon

If she met Ramon Enrich, Angelina Auledas, a hairdresser who works on Carrer del Castell in the village of Arbúcies, would nod her head vigorously, lower her gaze, click her tongue and say 'he looks as if he doesn't know if he's coming or going'. What made me think of her? Perhaps the chairs. In one of the lock-ups he uses to store his work, Enrich has built up a collection of chairs from the 1950's he has salvaged from junkyards and scrap merchants, all left exactly as he found them, without changing a thing. Some of them are design classics -an Eames rocking chair, a Moragas chair, or a Torres Clavé chair- while others are simple chairs made by the town locksmith or in local workshops, incorporating, without even knowing it existed, the spirit of the modernist movement. To make them last people upholstered them in floral patterns, painted and repainted them in house paint. From the living room they moved to the terrace, from the terrace to the stable (if the house had a stable, like Angelina's hairdresser's, which had living quarters and a place for livestock at the back), from the stable to Ramon Enrich's lock-up, which before becoming an artist's studio was a tanner's and a fabric workshop.

Angelina would have been right about him not knowing if he's coming or going. In the three to four hours I spent in Igualada we went all over the place without stopping for a second: from the station to the painter's studio, from the painter's studio to the lock-up, from the lock-up to the design studio where he is working on the image for REC.0 Experimental Stores, a scheme to revitalise Igualada's old industrial quarter. From the design studio to a leather factory where they know him, from the leather factory to the workshop of a neighbour who has built a musical instrument with stones from Segarra: a stone xylophone like the ones played by the Flintstones. It is highly entertaining as he picks up a couple of improvised mallets, starts playing the xylophone, decides it is out of tune, informs his neighbour and tells him off about it. We go back to the painter's studio and from there back to the station, although first we stop off at a factory that is being stripped (the woman working as the caretaker also knows him and lets us have a look around). He shows me the seamstress' changing rooms and bathroom done in beautiful, small blue-green tiles, with mirrors set a palm's width off the wall; the workers' lockers made by one of the town's locksmiths,



the bells, the photos on the wall with models holding a sign that says *Escorpión*. They are making an inventory of furniture, clocks and wastepaper bins: the workers will come one day and will be able to keep objects from the factory where they worked. The enthusiasm he puts into everything he does is amazing.

In the studio and the lock-up Ramon Enrich's work mixes with the world it came from; the things he likes, the artists he admires, and the books and catalogues that interest him. He is very thoughtful and it is not down to chance that you may find on a table the bearded face of Donald Judd in a monograph from 30 years ago or a leaflet from an exhibition by Richard Serra in Qatar, or that a book about Ed Ruscha seems to have been casually left under one of his recently finished pieces – a construction done in iron rods that makes you think of the Russian avant-garde and the way swings were when we were children. I will end this note on the atmosphere: amongst the garden furniture repainted a thousand times, the small cupboards, the writing desks (a wealth of aerodynamic knobs and handles and slender legs), I am amused to see a dismantled gymnastics vaulting box (what we called simply 'the box' at school), because the box seems contrary to the ironically nostalgic, affectionately sceptical, spirit of Ramon Enrich. Which is not to say that Enrich is not an athletic guy who would break into a sweat vaulting the box! Although his talent is opposed to whistles and standing in line I think he will end up doing something with this object. Perhaps he will liberate it, as he has liberated the chairs from the stable, the tannery from its work, and the soldering mask he has hanging on the wall from stainless steel and electrodes. It is possible he will use the box as a plinth or a pedestal. And with the box as a pedestal, Ramon Enrich would jump (without the need of a springboard) and do a somersault.

Adding up the different rooms in his studio and workshop (ground floor, stairs, first floor), the drying shed, the room with the pits, the room with the barrels, the corridors

and storage rooms at the leather factory, the artist's showroom next door with the stones, the changing rooms, the warehouses, the pressing rooms of the factory being moved: we have perhaps been in 30 or 40 spaces. Obviously he cannot always be like this. I am a guest! We never see each other and we want to talk about everything. And as well as that, I am the type of person who is always rushing around too. I feel at home in this industrial place. In a corner of the studio he has a section of a large sign – from a dealership or a petrol station – hanging up that says "BARRE". It looks like the lettering from Barreiros Motors. I tell him the main character in one of my books is called Barreiros, who is a lorry driver. If we switch from one thing to another at high speed it is because of how much we have in common, our enthusiasm; wanting to take on the world.

There is nothing like going fast. Although at the same time you have to know how to get off of a cartwheel when you feel like it. And Ramon Enrich has no problems with jumping or leaving a somersault half done. He is not merely impulsive with nothing behind it. For instance; he has discovered that many industrial buildings, even the simplest, conceal geometric forms of great purity. Sometimes an outside wall becomes a set of steps. Other times the door is so tall that the top corners almost touch the triangle of the roof. Other times it is the flat roof. Or a simple porch that protects the entrance. Or two slightly pointed vaults. Or a building with four walls and a door with a window on either side that make a face, like the house in Tati's *Mon Oncle*. Put up with a simple formwork, a few bricks, a layer of plaster and a couple of coats of paint. Enrich intervenes only slightly in the photographs he takes of these buildings. He eliminates the unnecessary elements, changes the colour of the sky and the walls. He isolates the building and points up the shadows that create perfect diagonals and rectangles. He transports us to the space of pure metaphysical abstraction found in De Chirico's squares and Ed Ruscha's gas stations.



The book *Learning from Las Vegas* (1972) by Robert Venturi, Denise Scott Brown and Steven Izenour is one of the great reference points of our age, as much as Beckett or Duchamp. It provides the formula for making the most of the simple things, the self-built, vernacular, or industrial, which contain a constructive logic and can be used efficiently, as well as displaying an innate sense of the monumental and spectacular. It is interesting to follow the line of influence of *Learning from Las Vegas* from *Arquitectura y lágrimas*, an essay by the PER practice in Barcelona in the 1970's, to *Estudando o Samba* or *Estudando o Pagode*, two albums by Tom Zé in São Paulo from 1970 and 2000. Ramon Enrich's work could be called *Learning from Igualada* or *Learning from the Rec District*. Or better still without the gerund: *What I Have Learnt*

from Igualada or *What I Have Learnt from the Rec District*.

By the same token you could have *What I Have Learnt from Segarra*. Since the same synthesis of elements that he discovers in a haulage contractor, a metal pressing workshop or in one of those single-storey flat-roofed bars, he has perhaps seen before in the three-step ladder into a pool, in a shepherd's hut (which Enrich strips of any hint of the picturesque: his small houses look like rooks in a chess set or Renaissance towers), in a house alone in the middle of a sown field or a hillside vineyard. Or in the landscape surrounding his house and his neighbours' houses. A network of squared lines that looks like the design on a tablecloth, the houses as if they are from a model railway diorama. The trees and bushes are like spindles and bobbins set on the in-

tersections of the lines or corralled in one of the corners that make a square. Everything that in everyday life is mobile and dizzying is solid and timeless in painting. And a similar thing happens with his sculptures. His sculptures made from iron rods that I see as being related to Tatlin and children's drawings, or his solid buildings modelled in clay, offspring of the Mesopotamic, Ancient Greek or Roman spirit houses and toy construction sets. Never have museum pieces (in an archaeological museum or museum-house of one of the heroes of the avant-garde) been as close to toys as in these works.

Ramon Enrich sifts through the essence of things, possibly to find a moment's rest, to detain the constant movement of things, to create spaces for retreat and meditation. Always drawing from everyday objects, and without losing his ironic touch. His spirit houses make one think of the gardens painted by Raoul Dufy, Nicolau Rubió i Tudurí and Llorens Artigas in the 1920's showing mythological scenes, sometimes also with profane episodes, such as altars to unknown gods. Enrich is developing a new form of ancestor worship: carpenters, locksmiths, metalworkers, decorators, plasterers and labourers, ancestors of today's computer men. When he photographs his clay houses and reproduces them in black and white, he is looking for an ambiguity that transports us away from the physical world; it is the idea of a house, the idea of a town, not the house itself, an actual neighbourhood or town. At times he paints a type of aerial view (as if he could fly over an abstraction in an aeroplane). Other times he finds perspective at ground level. He packs all the houses together side by side, like houses and hotels in Monopoly, like the green arches, yellow pillars, red pediments and blue beams in a box of toy building bricks, or archaeological pieces on the shelves of a museum store room. Sometimes, between one house and another, or between a house and a yard, he leaves space for a section of landscape or an alley that does nothing more than emphasise the sense of exile

and absence of a human presence. Nobody ever walks these alleys or landscapes. But once when I talked to him about one of the cabins surrounded by vineyards with a path leading to it, I realised that it had a story; in that shepherd's hut something had happened that I will not mention.

Something else that fascinates Ramon Enrich is offcuts. I also have a personal interest in them. Right by the house where I lived in the Poblenou district of Barcelona, I would often find sheets of tin with die holes cut out of them. For example, a rectangle with six round pieces cut out. Or the filings from laminated steel profiles. In Arbúcies there was a factory that made buses. Next door to the guesthouse run by my grandparents and mother there was a man who made leather upholstery for the bus seats. It was fascinating to pick up the angles that were left over from the cutting out process, with the curves that narrowed down into a point or horn shape. And then there were the tubes that were the heart of the rolls of imitation leather, which all the children in the street asked for. We could come to blows over a cardboard tube. Enrich collects the offcuts from sheets of metal and combines them in small sculptures (each one would take up a roundabout if they were large). There is something I really like about the way he presents his pieces: for sculptures made from metal rods he uses tables with iron rods for legs to show them on; to show sculptures made from cut out sheet metal he uses a support made of sheet metal. Artwork and utilitarian object, united by material. It is a way of saying that utilitarian objects are works of art, and artworks are also useful objects. One can be made with the castoff material of the other, and vice versa.

This interest in cutting out and discarding also occurs in his lettered pieces, where he leaves out letters from a poem or song. In the same way that the metal rectangle was missing six round pieces, now there are two *a*'s, an *s* or a *b* that are gone or have dropped off. This disappearance forces us to concentrate on the letters that remain, on the section they

occupy, and on how they relate to the background and the space, worked with washes, drips and trails. Now he has discovered leather offcuts, he looks at them and contemplates them. I think it won't be long before they appear in a new series, collage or poster.

Synthesis, cut outs, drips, absence, negatives, aerial views, filing cabinets: forms combine and recombine. I believe Ramon Enrich strategically places his

artworks in the spaces where he works, close to his raw materials, so that they help him to stabilise his world. As if they were lead, weights on a loom, continually tensing the warp of the cloth being woven. And if a visitor or client takes a liking to a certain piece -something not at all far-fetched- it vanishes without leaving a trace, like an explorer swallowed by sinking sand, and another beautiful object takes its place.

Ramon Enrich

Arquitectures, fotografies i altres volums
[Architectures, Photographs and other Volumes]

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