

## Photographs of Theatre that Could Not Be. Maruja Mallo's Stage Designs

Josefina González Cubero

School of Architecture, University of Valladolid, Spain

Translation: Beth Gelb

### Abstract

*Over the first half of the 20th century, avant-garde painters delved into theatre art and conceived innovative designs they put forward to break through the prevailing naturalism of the time. Spanish painter Maruja Mallo (1902-1995) also took an interest in stage design, first through her reciprocally influenced work with Rafael Alberti and then on her own. She produced designs that have been recorded in both her own and others' photographs and in comments attesting to her work in this field. Both the silence of her former lovers (Rafael Alberti and Miguel Hernández) in this regard and traditional attitudes about women on the part of other intellectuals of the time together, coupled with the tragedy of the Spanish Civil War and exile have left very few vestiges of her interesting stage design work, to which she had attached a great deal of importance before the war. This article highlights Maruja Mallo's unique stage designs, her identity as compared to other influential artists, and her influence and legacy, in addition to explaining these designs' links to architecture.*

**Keywords:** Maruja Mallo, avant-garde, stage design, architecture, photography.

Little is known about why the Spanish painter from Galicia, Ana María Gómez González, known in the world of art as Maruja Mallo, studied stage design. What can be asserted, however, is that with the intention of acquiring solid knowledge on the subject, on the third of February 1931, she requested a scholarship from the *Junta para Ampliación de Estudios e Investigaciones Científicas* -JAE- (Board for the Expansion of Scientific Study and Research) to study abroad. Her aim was to be in Paris for six months to study *'the painting of stage design art'*<sup>1</sup>, as she wrote in her request that attests to her conception of stage design as an extension of painting. Her stay in Paris, including the scholarship, its extension and the prolongation of her sojourn there at her own expense, began on 23 October 1931 and lasted until roughly mid November 1932.

Although she was young at the time, Maruja Mallo was already a consecrated, well-known artist. In an interview given shortly before her departure on the

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<sup>1</sup> Request for board from Maruja Mallo submitted to the *Junta para Ampliación de Estudios* to study stage design in Paris, 3 February 1931, Archivo Edad de Plata, Residencia de Estudiantes, Madrid.

scholarship, she expressed her aim to organise an exhibition as soon as she arrived and also added: '*I would also like to see and learn stage design. This is one of my plans for Paris. I find it very interesting. Particularly, I believe that a lot of new things can be done in stage design*' (Carabias, 14/11/1931: 43). It may be that, as is the case with many other artists, a canvass on an easel wasn't enough, as so she requested the scholarship not only to study stage design in general, but its most modern aspects, '*to study in stage design workshops, theatres, and museums of the modern current of theatre decoration*'. In the opinion of Shirley Mangini, the purpose of the trip was '*something that she and Alberti had originally planned to do together*' (Mangini, 2012: 156). However, when Alberti took off with María Teresa León to Majorca a year prior to the request, it marked both Mallo's definitive separation from the poet and the beginning of his silence in her regard (Alberti, 29/09/1985). Nevertheless, both Alberti and Mallo remained in contact with the theatre<sup>2</sup> ever since they began their passionate, stormy relationship in 1925.

One would have to go back to Maruja Mallo's last years of training at the *Academia de Bellas Artes de San Fernando* when she was introduced by Salvador Dalí into the *Residencia de Estudiantes* circles, soon befriending young artists, writers and film directors belonging to the so-called '*Generation of '27*'<sup>3</sup>. That is how she met Rafael Alberti, who began to work on theatre that year in parallel to his poetry. Maruja Mallo's first approach to theatre may have been encouraged by her tie to Alberti as a lover<sup>4</sup>. As of then, she was to go on to work on both her painting and stage design. While the two artists each expressed his and her own art, painting and poetry, their complicity and reciprocal influence can be seen when analysing the parallelisms in their works (Ferris, 2004: 143-

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<sup>2</sup> Shortly after Mallo's, Alberti also obtained a scholarship from the JAE to study new orientations of French theatre. Alberti and María Teresa León travelled between 1932 and 1933 to Paris, to various European countries, and extended their stay abroad to the USSR, which was not included in the scholarship. Alberti continued to work on political theatre and María Teresa León researched proletarian theatre and held various posts in the theatre.

<sup>3</sup> Rafael Alberti, Luis Buñuel, Salvador Dalí, Federico García Lorca, Concha Méndez, Gregorio Prieto and María Zambrano, among many others.

<sup>4</sup> Perhaps Alberti, an assiduous concert and opera-goer, conveyed to Mallo his admiration of Diaghilev's Russian ballets that he saw live in the Spanish debut of *The Three-Cornered Hat* in Madrid's Royal Theatre on 5 April 1921. The work was based on the novel by the same name written by Pedro Antonio de Alarcón, with a set and figures by Pablo Picasso and music by Manuel de Falla.

171). Moreover, their artistic communion came about when working on synthesizing their works, the interdisciplinary point of encounter (playwriting, directing, acting, stage design, music and audience) to generate an organic whole, which is, as critic Ramón Pérez de Ayala tirelessly sustained in Spain, theatre as a performance, theatre as art (Pérez de Ayala, 25/11/1915: 4).

Immersed in this climate of stage design regeneration, the enthusiastic young couple discovered a realm of creative diversion and rebellion against social conventions. Seeking other models to combat the prevailing mediocrity on the Spanish stage, they pooled from Spanish popular culture for inspiration<sup>5</sup>. One year later, Mallo decribed two issues around which her work revolved, the streets and folk customs (Mallo, 1939: 8), experiences from her frequent promenades with her mates at the Residencia de Estudiantes. Thus, Mallo and Alberti undertook their first works in theatre from a popular, playful standpoint, although very few of the works that she shared with her lover remain.

The first theatre project, *La pájara pinta* (1926), for Vittorio Podrecca's marionette theatre company, arose from Óscar Esplá's insistence. He proposed that Alberti write the script, that he entitled '*Guirigay lírico bufo bailable*' (danceable lyrical chaotic spoof). In principle, the stage design and figures were done by Benjamín Palencia and Mallo did some drawings some time after that (Mateos & Ramos, 2005: 61-81)<sup>6</sup>. Of these drawings, Alberti much later acknowledged '*The full colour prints that Maruja drew were something more than figures. I don't know whether they are still around, but they would make up a surprising album full of leaps, of graceful, playful cunning, an example of bright stage design creations*' (Alberti, 29/09/1985)<sup>7</sup>. The second project for theatre was *El colorín colorado* or *Colorín colorete* (1926). Once again it was for a musical puppet production whose script was written by Alberti, score by Ernesto Halffter, and stage design was attributed to Benjamín Palencia (Mateos

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<sup>5</sup> Unlike in other European avant-garde movements, folk traditions became a common theme and basic aspiratin for all Spanish intellectuals and artists during the first third of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

<sup>6</sup> According to Mateos Miera, *La pájara pinta's* stage design was to be produced by Benjamín Palencia although Mallo drew a sketch for the backdrop with notes for its figures in 1929.

<sup>7</sup> If one lends credibility to Alberti's memories at the end of his life, when he perhaps confused the years, then it is understood that the sketches for *La pájara pinta* stage design were done by Maruja Mallo.

Miera, Autumn 2003: 67)<sup>8</sup>. Irrespectively of the target audience, the first performance was for children and the second for adults, both contained a playful hark back to painting, poetry and music whose roots are steeped in two characteristic dances of the *entremés* from the Spanish Golden Age, the *guirigay* and the *colorín colorado*, as Mateos Miera opportunely reminds us (Autumn 2003: 67). In any event, what can be verified from both works is that in 1929, Mallo exhibited certain drawings of figures under the title *Figuras del guiñol y Colorín colorete* (Puppet Figures and *Colorín Colorete*). Still today, there are no further traces of these two works.

Given Mallo's skyrocketing career as a painter, these dabblings into theatre, which share the same creative atmosphere, were to soon be left behind. Her first solo exhibit in the capital, held in the premises of the *Revista de Occidente* on Madrid's Gran Vía on 26 May 1928, earned her tremendous success and great notoriety throughout Spain. The *Verbenas* and *Estampas populares, deportivas, de máquinas y maniqués, y cinemáticas* series (Prints of folk, sports, machinery, mannequins and cinema) were exhibited there. In these series, she addressed not only local idiosyncrasies with a mark of her own but also the recurring themes of modernity with futurist and cubist accents, through a superposition of a host of views of daily life, a recomposed kaleidoscopic vision to be seen as a strange whole which was to be termed 'magic realism' by German critic Franz Roh in 1925.

Shortly before the exhibition at the *Revista de Occidente* took place, the seeds for a new path in Mallo's painting had been planted. She began to take walks with Alberto Sánchez and Benjamín Palencia, founders of the Vallecas School, around the underworlds of Madrid's outskirts. In this new company, Mallo began to lean towards the exaggerated and surreal, reflected in the macabre, foul destruction depicted in the series '*Cloacas y Campanarios*' (Sewers and Belfries) exhibited in Paris in 1932. But her painting took another leap forward in dimension when Mallo portrayed herself as a subject of art in the photographs that her brother took of her in the summer of 1929 in Cercedilla. In these

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<sup>8</sup> According to Mateos Miera the stage design for *El colorín colorado* was to be done by Benjamín Palencia.

photographs she appeared amid a setting of bones and waste to narrate her theatrication as a person (Mangini, 2007: 299.) in a sort of animated model of her paintings that served as a early taste of her best stage design.

That same year marked the pinnacle of Mallo and Alberti's artistic work together. They undertook the religious theme of Golden Age theatre from a contemporary perspective and, once again undertook theatre in verse with the popular legend of *Saint Casilda* (1929). Because of the imminent debut scheduled for the end of 1930, Mallo was well along on her stage design project, no documental trace of which is known. The Chilean Ambassador to Spain at the time, Carlos Morla Lynch, remembers one of Alberti's prior readings in his statement: '*Maruja Mallo is the inspired artist of this play's stage design that has an evangelistic nature and, as Rafael continues on with his reading [...], in silent gestures, she lays out on the floor, on top of the carpet, the sketches illustrating several paintings, in light shades, virginally pale pinks and blues*' (Mateos Miera, 2003: 70). It is clear that the seraphic nature of the hues in the stage design, so very much the contrary of the intense colours in the designs of previous puppet theatres, ever aims to unify words and images. Nothing more fruitful in the field of theatre ever materialized between these two allies, since a coldness that was eventually to lead to their breakup set in between them.

Once she was on her own, Mallo produced the stage design for the children's production of the 1929 Wise Kings celebration in the women's Lyceum Club using the same initial playful folk premise. '*The stage décor represented a "nativity" in the most traditional Christmas toy tradition, i.e. the mill, the mule and the ox, the little tree that looks like a stick and the three divine persons of the Mystery*' (08/01/1929: 29)<sup>9</sup>. There are also indications of her aim to produce the stage design for a script by the bullfighter Ignacio Sánchez Mejías in 1930.

The background that Mallo described in her scholarship application for Paris makes her didacticism on sets clear: '*who for the last two years has taken an interest in painting stage design art with no more experience than the very*

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<sup>9</sup> The *entremés Fábrica de estrellas* by Ernestina Champourcín was staged and *Égloga* by Juan del Encina and, to conclude, the *auto sacramental* in a single act, *El ángel cartero*, the only play debuted by Concha Méndez, a great friend of Mallo's, published in 1931.

*slight amount made available by the Spanish stage and the compiling of French, English and German books on the subject*. She acknowledged having becoming interested in stage design merely two years before her departure, as if *La pájara pinta* and *El colorín colorado* had been a mere distraction, and she admitted a certain amount of experience on the Spanish stage, one assumes as both an author and audience. Aside from this, she appears to be broadly documented. In addition, hypothetically, it is very likely that Mallo, due to the circle of friends she kept in the Residencia de Estudiantes, would have completed her training by attending conferences aimed at bring about a regeneration in theatre and new staging given by leading foreign teachers and organized by the *Sociedad de Cursos y Conferencias* (Courses and Conferences Society), or, given that she was aware of the granting of scholarships for training abroad, by attending plays and shows as the JAE's various locations.

Once she arrived in Paris she had contact with several plastic artists, and according to what is compiled in the JAE's *Memoria correspondiente a los cursos 1931 y 1932*<sup>10</sup> (Academic year report) Mallo visited museums (Louvre, Trocadero, Cluny, Fine Arts) and galleries where stage designs were conserved. She broadened out her knowledge by studying film scenography<sup>11</sup> in the Paramount and Pathé-Natan studios and in the studio of artists Jean and Valentine Hugo, who worked on the costume and set design for the film *The Passion of Jeanne d'Arc* (1928) by Carl Dreyer, and of the Polish painter Louis Marcoussis. There was a reason behind her statement to Luis Gómez Mesa two years prior: *'I confess I owe a lot to cinema'* (Gómez de Mesa, 15/05/1930: 3). Furthermore she completed her training activities by attending leading theatre productions. Perhaps the most significant information to be found in the report is that she did stage designs for the Portuguese playwright Gil Vicente, for the Argentine Ventura de la Vega, and the Spanish playwrights from the Golden Age

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<sup>10</sup> *Memoria correspondiente a los cursos 1931 y 1932* de la JAE, pp. 39-40, Archivo Edad de Plata, Residencia de Estudiantes, Madrid.

<sup>11</sup> Cinema exerted a great deal of influence on Mallo, just as the intellectual, artistic, national and international avant-garde that considered it to be the modern art par excellence. Mallo devoted *Estampas cinemáticas* (1927-1928) and *Cómicos del cine mudo* (1929) to cinema. During her stay in South America she was to have special contact with cinema when she made three murals, 'Armonías plásticas' as they were called, to decorate the vestibule of the Los Angeles cinema designed by architects Abel López Chas and Federico Zemborain and opened in 1946 on Buenos Aires' Avenida Corrientes.

Lope de Vega and Calderón de la Barca. In her scholarship application she had indicated '*that she would like to directly contact stage design workshops in Paris as a way to consolidate her knowledge and apply it to Spanish theatre and particularly to classical theatre where it is so broadly present*'. The report also indicates that the stage designs created were exhibited in 1932 in the Galerie Pierre exhibition which could feasibly be the same exhibition as the one entitled '*Cloacas y Campanarios*', although unfortunately no information is available to attest to this.

Once she was back in Madrid she began to teach in order to obtain a steady income that her father's death had deprived her of, and she discovered children's drawings that she applied to book covers and vignettes for magazines. Together with *caminantes vallecanos* Alberto and Benjamín, joined by Pablo Neruda and Miguel Hernández, she sought spiritual meaning in nature and man by analysing their intimate architecture in order to find a new order. Through mathematics and the significant qualities of matter, she endeavoured to unravel their principles. She was influenced by the Constructive Art of Uruguayan painter Joaquín Torres García, whom she probably met while she was in Paris. All of these quests endeavours intermingled with her inclination for poets. The romantic relationship she probably had with Pablo Neruda followed a fling with peasant Miguel Hernández<sup>12</sup>. Their influence on each other was evident<sup>13</sup>. She had an affinity with Hernández's philosophy regarding the land, and the two travelled together across the landscape of Castile, incorporating it into their plastic and literary creations. It is known that together, at the end of 1935, they envisaged the drama *Los hijos de la piedra*, inspired on events in Casa Viejas and Asturias. Mallo's set design fell into line with the rural aesthetics of the Vallecas School.

Very shortly before the Spanish Civil War broke out in 1936, two of Mallo's previous periods of painting were significantly disseminated internationally

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<sup>12</sup> Her definitive encounter with Miguel Hernández took place in February 1935 in Pablo Neruda's Casa de las Flores in Madrid, although she had met him years prior.

<sup>13</sup> Mallo's influence on Miguel Hernández can be found in the four compositions that he removed from *Unceasing Lightning* under the name *Image of Your Footprint* and in 18 of the 30 poems in that work.

through her participation in three exhibitions in Paris, Venice and London<sup>14</sup>. Inside Spain, she also contributed works to the exhibition 'Logicofobista' sponsored by ADLAN (*Amigos de las artes nuevas* – Friends of the New Arts) and to the exhibition held in Barcelona's Galeries Catalònia from 4 to 15 May. However, her painting had already taken a turn for the hopeful vision of nature and man reflected in her third individual exhibition organized by ADLAN in the *Centro de Estudios e Información de la Construcción* (Centre for Studies and Information on Construction) on Madrid's Carrera de San Jerónimo from 16 May to 5 June. The exhibition's content covered the period from her return from Paris and reflected her affinity with Torres García and the Vallecas group. It was comprised of 12 works from the *Arquitecturas minerales y vegetales* (Mineral and Vegetable architectures) series, also known as 'lyrical anatomies' of nature, 16 drawings from *Construcciones rurales y edificaciones campesinas* (Rural buildings and peasant constructions), *Plástica escenográfica* (Plastic Set Design) and *Cerámicas* (Ceramics) also known as 'circular anatomies', and the final touch, the painting *La sorpresa del trigo* (The Wheat Surprise).

Geometry characterizes the works of this third period, featuring the series *Construcciones rurales y edificaciones campesinas*<sup>15</sup>, which has an architectural component to it. In 1937 Mallo described the series as having '*fruits of my explorations on the lands of Castile, where I found timeless materials and forms, new realities, new human physiognomies; central foundations and guiding principles or fundamental bases for the construction of our ultimate object: a new reality which would go on creating an unknown plastic order. The integration of soul and substance: Oneness*' (Mallo, 1939: 36)<sup>16</sup>. The series

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<sup>14</sup> She participated in what was to be the last exhibition of the *Sociedad de Artistas Ibéricos* (SAI) under the title *L'Art espagnol contemporain (peinture et sculpture)*<sup>14</sup> held with the support of the France-Spain committee at the *Musée des Écoles Étrangères, Jeu de Paume des Tuileries*, between 12 February and March 1936 in Paris. There was also the *Mostra Spagnuola* at the *Biennale de Venecia* Spanish pavilion, and she was selected for *The International Surrealist Exhibition* that opened on 11 June in London's New Burlington Galleries.

<sup>15</sup> The series was presented in 1933 at the *Grupo de Arte Constructivo* exhibition in Madrid's *Salón de Otoño*.

<sup>16</sup> Mallo, M. (1939). *Lo popular en la plástica española a través de mi obra 1928-1936*. Buenos Aires: Losada. The text refers back to an article that had been published shortly prior by Victoria Ocampo's magazine *Sur* 43, Buenos Aires, April 1938, and in the magazine *Grafos*, Habana, January-February 1939. It was later published in (1942)

, 1928-1942. Buenos Aires: Losada, pp. 39-43, with a preliminary study by Ramón

contains drawings of the skeleton or volume of country farm buildings or 'anatomies of this rural architecture' (Mallo, 1939: 37) - i.e. pigeon lofts, sheds, huts, pens, and so forth- which take life as living zoomorphic and anthropomorphic forms, and scenes from nature that are humanized, all giving rise to strange beings. Formal symmetry can be perceived as a property of the buildings and gives rise to the incipient appearance of another symmetry constructing the pictorial representation in the painting *La sorpresa del trigo*, an early taste of her works she would go on to do in South America.

Her work from 1935 to the beginning of 1936 gave rise to several models of stage design elements and figures, the series known as *Plástica escenográfica*, for the comic opera *Clavileño* by Rodolfo Halffter whose score and libretto have both been lost. The performance was organized by the *Sociedad de Cursos y Conferencias* for the Residencia de Estudiantes Auditorium, but was unable to debut as planned in the summer of 1936 because of the military coup against the Republic on 18 July. The title of the work alludes to the magical wooden horse from the episode of the second part of *Don Quixote of La Mancha* by Miguel de Cervantes and is about the joke that the dukes play in the gardens of their palace on the Knight and his squire.

The *Plástica escenográfica* models were displayed in the exhibition and have endured today through photographs attesting to Mallo's work on *Clavileño*. First, there are two photographs of Maruja Mallo in her studio. In one of these photographs, dated in Madrid in 1936<sup>17</sup> she appears by herself in front of paintings including *La sorpresa del trigo*, and with six figures from this series (Figure 1). Five figures can be seen in the other photograph where she stands beside critic Manuel Abril in front of the *Cerámicas* (Corredoira, 1993: 360) (Figure 2).

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Gómez de la Serna. The beginning of the text in this publication refers to a conference given in the "Amigos del Arte" Society in Montevideo in July 1937.

<sup>17</sup> Photograph property of Antonio María Gómez Conde, partially cropped in Mallo, M. (1939). *Lo popular en la plástica española a través de mi obra 1928-1936*. Buenos Aires: Losada.



**Figure 1.** Maruja Mallo in her Madrid studio, 1936 (Courtesy of Antonio María Gómez Conde).



**Figure 2.** Maruja Mallo in her studio with Manuel Abril.

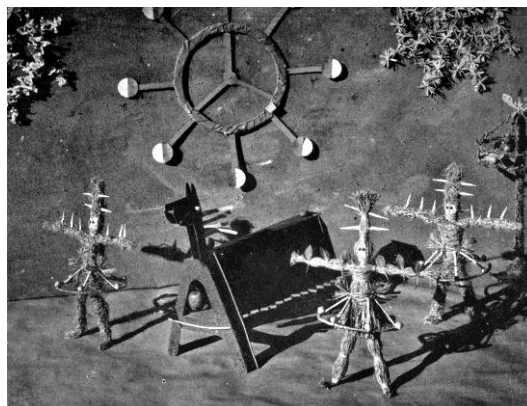
Another five photographs published containing stage set compositions must be added, plus the photograph of a figure standing alone<sup>18</sup> (Figure 3), in order to complete all of the known documentation. Generally speaking, the photographs

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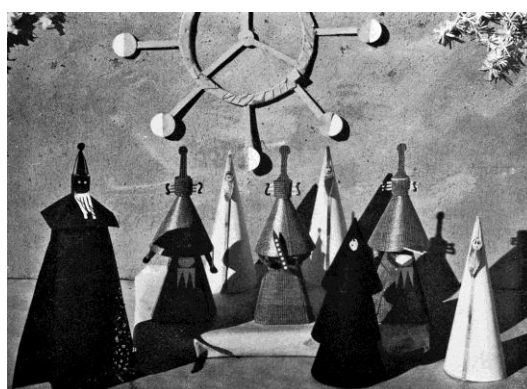
<sup>18</sup> The most complete photographic information is found in (1942). *Maruja Mallo. 59 grabados en minas en color, 1928-1942*. Buenos Aires: Losada. The photographs can be identified under the following numbers: sheets XXIII to XXVII and illustration of the figure standing alone on p. 27.

frame in stage design compositions with marked symmetry and certain traces of 'Cloacas y Campanarios'. These compositions are made up of cursory humanized architecture and figures, and presided over by different shaped suns, foreboding the strict symmetry in her South American paintings. Basically two types of figures can be distinguished. There are the scarecrows, either with their bodies spread out or cone shaped and with sharp forms and made of natural materials such as sawdust, wood chips, cork, hay, esparto, wool, and so forth, and there are other figures similar to penitents in the religious processions during Spain's Holy Week, with both simple and compound conical forms made entirely out of cardboard and termed by Gómez de la Serna as 'a whole plastic world of cones, of cones from gathered harvests' (Gómez de la Serna, 1942: 12).

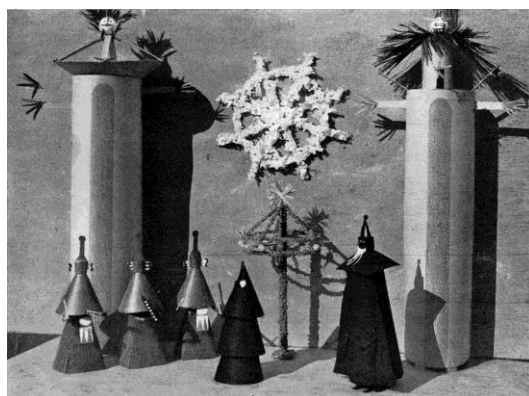
**Figure 3.** Photographs for *Plástica escenográfica (Clavileño)*, in (1942) *en color*, 1928-1942. Buenos Aires: Losada.



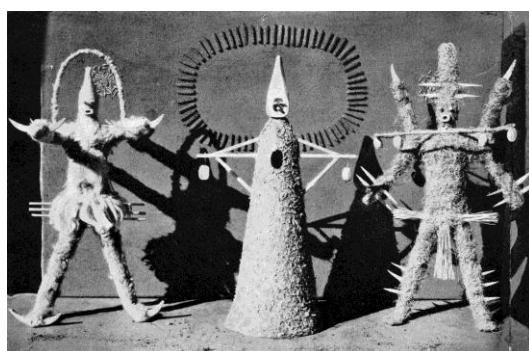
Sheet XXIII



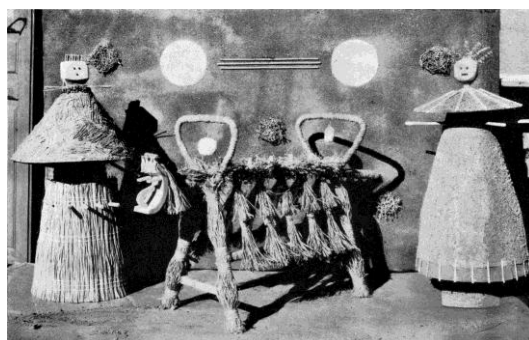
Sheet XXIV



Sheet XXV



Sheet XXVI



Sheet XXVII

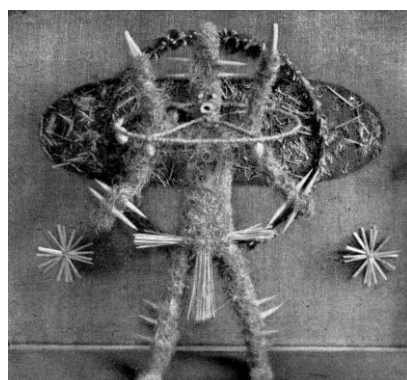


Figure standing alone, p. 27.

While this work was gestating, Mallo published a short article entitled 'Escenografía' (Mallo, March 1935: 1)<sup>19</sup> that was revealing about how *Clavileño* was conceived, and she illustrated it with two photographs of models for this 'plastic-musical performance'. This was the first time she spoke of stage design and she began by taking a stance on what theatre is and what about it was of interest to her: '*Theatre must generate a performance. I am interested in stage design as a creation and as an architectural science*' (Mallo, March 1935: 1). The statement condensed Mallo's ideas because it merged her bent towards comprehensive theatre with the notion of architectural theatre. Her change in attitude after Paris becomes evident when comparing it to the understanding of stage design expressed in her application, i.e. '*the painting of stage design art*'. This is why her reiterated use of the term architecture to designate the series, her mention throughout the book and even its title, *Maruja Mallo. Arquitecturas* (Cassou, 1949) comes as no surprise. Published by Tomás Seral y Casas after the war in October 1949 with a forward by Jean Cassou, it goes back to the project for an exhibition that the publisher had to halt because of the war.

Both types of figures' similarity with some of the architecture in the series *Construcciones rurales y edificaciones campesinas*, which came before *Plástica escenográfica*, draw our attention. What Mallo did with *Clavileño* was to architecturalize the set, that is, to assert the three-dimensional nature of the volumes, to order the set under the rule of symmetry, and dispose of lighting to enhance the shapes. She provided details of the stage design's characteristics in her article:

For this plastic-musical performance I present a three dimensional stage design built out of real, tangible, solid bodies. In other words, there will be no fake elements like in the old illusionist set designs with paper or painted cloth drop scenes like paintings without any relief. Instead, the set will have a harmonic awareness in space, with congruence between each and every part, where the characters move in all directions, going

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<sup>19</sup> Shortly after is published the text 'Clavileño' accompanied by a photograph of the stage design, in the plastic arts section of the magazine *Noreste* N° 11, Zaragoza, summer 1935. It also appears in the magazines *Las cuatro estaciones*, 7 June 1935, *Grafos*, Habana, May 1938 and *Conducta*, Buenos Aires, April 1939.

up, down, entering, exiting the six sides of the set to give the play extraordinary vivaciousness and dynamic strength. They will be subjected to the best lighting effects and orderly groupings on the set.

The elements comprising the set will be revolving. Some will be portable, others fixed. They will conform an architecture made of both dynamic and static surfaces and bodies.

Theatre's fundamental principle is to train the body with imagination, turning it into a tool for theatre creation. I use the human body as a mechanical skeleton for my sculptural architecture that will move as it relates to a harmonic, stage design unity. The entrance of a character on the scene for me is the presence of a body with the corresponding colour and material that will relate to the overall organization of the set.

Each character will carry its own mask according to its representation, and these masks will be fixed or portable. (Mallo, March 1935: 1)

Mallo uses the contrast between the dynamic and the stillness of the forms together with the movement in all directions of all of the character-artefacts as means to breath dynamic force into the performance and blurs the bounds of the stage. In the garb of so-called '*sculptural architecture*', masks appear in order to add specific qualities to the characters and turn them definitively into large puppets. The subject-actor is then seen to be in total union with the object-architecture instead of merely circulating around it. As a mechanical skeleton the actor penetrates the architecture to become a single entity with it and establish an agreement with the materiality of the set, the true protagonist. Mallo is thus able to convey empathy for the soberness of the Castile countryside though the its dry, crackling, golden wheat in an atmosphere that reflects the natural materials she used to build her models purchased in a tireless quest for them in Neruda's pleasant company among the shops of Madrid. Mallo finishes the article with an argument regarding formal essentializing: '*I reduce everything to a simple, immediate expression and with my imagination give shape to things instead of arbitrarily transfiguring them*' (Mallo, March 1935: 1).

One could say that by starting with pictorial work, the link that Mallo makes between stage design and architecture is one of the traits that was to

characterize *Clavileño*. The link is established in two ways, in the three dimensional decoration of bodies and in the genesis of the figures. Mallo came to understand painting as a subsidiary of other spheres of art with no two-dimensional limitations. '*My easel painting has gone to the stage, to the wall*' (Mallo, 1939: 36). And stage design is a discipline that can include movement in space so that these constructions can become living beings, beings that are articulated and characterized as veritable walking architecture. In other words, architecture is dramatized by breathing the dynamism of life into it.

The modernity of Mallo's designs can be observed if it is compared to any other stage design done by Spanish avant-garde artists<sup>20</sup>. It suffices to remember the stage designs of Alberto Sánchez Pérez who, as a sculptor, was perhaps closest to a three dimensional conception of theatre. The stage design for the first representation on 8 November 1933 of the ballet-pantomime *La romería de los cornudos*<sup>21</sup> in Madrid's Calderón theatre by the company *La Argentinita*, with music by Gustavo Pittaluga and story by Federico García Lorca and Cipriano Rivas Cherif, and the design for *Fuenteovejuna* by Lope de Vega staged in 1936 by the *Teatro Universitario La Barraca* company and directed by García Lorca and Ugalde, stand as two examples. It seems that Mallo intervened in some of the stage designs for this company<sup>22</sup>. Alberto did both of these productions with painted curtain designs depicting rural architecture in quaint, folkloric hues. The characters interact against a relatively realistic backdrop with the traditional separation of formal treatment between the context and the actors' bodies. Alberto produces a backdrop while Mallo builds a surrounding.

Nothing certain can be asserted about Mallo's exact knowledge of European avant-garde theatre, although as mentioned, she had documentary information about the international stage and completed her training in Paris. What can be said is that Mallo, influenced perhaps by Torres García's fondness for

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<sup>20</sup> Artists including Salvador Bartolozzi, Norah Borges, José Caballero, Salvador Dalí, Ángel Ferrant, Federico García Lorca, Ramón Gaya, Maruja Mallo, Joan Miró, Santiago Ontañón, Manuel Ángeles Ortiz, Benjamín Palencia, Alfonso Ponce de León, and Alberto Sánchez.

<sup>21</sup> There is no agreement as to whether the stage design must be attributed to Alberto Sánchez or Salvador Bartolozzi.

<sup>22</sup> Institutional initiatives such as the *Teatro Universitario de La Barraca* and the *Teatro de Misiones Pedagógicas* during the Spain's Second Republic contributed to disseminating theatre for both didactic and entertainment purposes.

transformable toys, made actors into objects on the stage, into puppets or articulated dolls whose expression came from the masking of their bodies. Despite the difference in time and distance, one cannot help but being reminded of other costume designs and masks from the 1920s of the relatively unknown, tragic German couple Lavinia Schulz and Walter Holdt who materialized their cutting edge heterodox plastic theatre art, as compared with the great level of abstraction achieved by Oskar Schlemmer, made organic references to nature and the animal world in some of their work through the use of discarded material they found. This is reminiscent of Mallo's work although her results differ.

Mallo's political commitment to the Republic and the outbreak of the war lead her to take exile in South America, the land where she produced her stage design epilogue for the *Cantata en la tumba de Federico García Lorca* (Pérez Rodríguez, 2014: 84 y 93)<sup>23</sup> by Alfonso Reyes whose score was written by Jaime Pahissa, and which debuted, very similarly to *Clavileño* in both formal and material appearance, in Buenos Aires on 2 August 1938. This end to her work in theatre leaves one of the most interesting perspectives of Spanish stage design without any furthering.

This is the succinct history of Maruja Mallo's artistic endeavours extending into stage design for theatre that, though she devoted herself to it, could not be and has only remained through scant documents, although perhaps more will be found.

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<sup>23</sup> Letter by Maruja Mallo to Alfonso Reyes, Buenos Aires, 20 February 1938. A schematic drawing of the stage design for the *Cantata* appears beside the signature.

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**Josefina González Cubero.** Architect. Doctorate in Architecture in 1996. Her PhD Thesis studies the urban work of Le Corbusier. Professor in Architectural Projects since 1997 in the Department Architectural Theory and Designs at the University of Valladolid's Technical School of Architecture in Spain, where she teaches on graduate and posgraduate levels. Her research interests are the relationship between architecture and other arts. Coordinator of Architecture an Cinema Research Group and colaborator researcher of the CEAA -Centro de Estudios Arnaldo Araújo-.