

## **Towards a Necrogeography of the Sublime: *Pantonecropolis* – Alejandro Gómez de Tuddo**

(AuditoriumArte, Rome March 2016)

***Pantonecropolis presents us with a free, fantasy-like world where both living and departed can ideally co-exist, in a topos which follows and transcends aesthetic norms, allowing for the sublime.***

Sublime encounters are of the most visceral and memorable ones in human experience. *Pantonecropolis* explores how architectural and landscape manipulations can evoke sublime experiences and can lift individuals from the everyday into the transcendental. Alejandro Gómez de Tuddo takes us into a necrogeography of the *everyday*, of the mundane and of the detail, and mirrors this journey with a necrogeography of the *beyond*.

In one movement of *Pantonecropolis*, based on panoramic photographs, we can see how the cemetery meanders into and merges with the urbanscape. The other movement focuses on the microcosm of the necrogeography, so as to reach out to the beyond. Both movements of the exhibition, when brought together, investigate the transcendental nature of the cemetery.

According to Schopenhauer, one of the aspects of *das Erhabene*, or 'being raised from one's everyday self', describes the essence of the sublime as an apprehension of immortality - where we no longer identify with the fragile self – as the intimate photographs show - but with the eternal and indestructible universe - as the panoramic photographs show. A sublime experience, then, is one of deep satisfaction. Deep satisfaction is at the heart of our wanderings into *Pantonecropolis*, during which we focus both on the discrete details of the cemetery as place (a crucifix, a plastic flower, a portrait, a glove) and on the wider space of the cemetery which merges and morphs with its surroundings. *Pantonecropolis* offers a journey onto cemeteries' immanence, permanence and identity, and on their relationship with life and death, with the here and the there, and with the before and the after.

Cemeteries are deliberately created and highly organised cultural landscapes, which tell much about mankind's view of life and death. The photographs which focus on the inner dealings of societies betray our chaotic fears, terrors and tremors which ironically create some sort of order, when all is seemingly gone. The panoramic photographs reflect the architectural liberty and the aesthetic freedom granted by death, which frees man from cultural constructions. These photographs show how funeral architecture becomes the ultimate expression where all fantasies, all emotions can be: if there is a *mimesis* between the architecture of life and that of death, the latter goes further, architectural imagination is let loose, and the departed are granted with a palimpsest of potentialities and emotional avatars of all that which could have been, may never have been and yet, is now, for ever.

Serving both functional and emotional purposes, being both sacred and profane, cemeteries have become a microcosm of the outside world, where all questions can be raised, and no answers should be provided. *Pantonecropolis* places the viewer at the heart of the new universe which death has brought forth, as both continuation of and solution to the known world.

When art addresses the fundamental sacred problem of the cemetery, it allows for suitable symbols which will refer to and express mankind's hope of immortality: *Pantonecropolis* elaborates a non-semiotic discourse on a deathscape, which, both as a space and a landscape, has spiritual and mystical overtones. *Pantonecropolis* places us at the border of the threshold: places vanish, and in come spaces. The spaces which we are presented with morph into their unknown future which stands at the threshold. The spatial threshold, as a motif, as a character, and as an agent of the artistic discourse is at the heart of Alejandro Gómez de Tuddo's artistic endeavour.

Space is presented as a main tool through which human beings organise the world around them. And at the same time, space is also an unstable construction, as the artist shows. The clearest example of an unstable boundary is the motif of the panoramic images which offer sites in which a high emotional intensity is concentrated, indicating "a moment of crisis, at an unfinalisable – and unpredeterminable – turning point", as Bakhtin has it. In these representations, thresholds frame the access into the supernatural, where an answer to the riddle of death in life lays.

On the one hand, the intimate photographs give us a glimpse of the cemetery as a 'collective representation', a sacred, symbolic replica of the living community that expressed many of the community's basic beliefs and values. These photographs present us with material signs of the cemetery (lots, graves and markers owned by specific families, portraits, memorabilia and tangible memories) which locate these transformed dead in living time and ordered space, and in so doing symbolically help to maintain their on-going individual identities and affirm their continued social existence through memory. On the other hand, the panoramic photographs show how cemetery is the appropriate sacred space where the living and the dead are separated and symbolically joined as one people. Hence, in these large photographs, time merges with space, the space of death melts into the space of life, and the threshold is zoomed in upon.

Bringing together the space and the place of the cemetery is a way for Alejandro Gómez de Tuddo to express that cemeteries are specifically demarcated sites of burial, conducive both to mankind claiming control over their grave *spaces*, and to the conducting of funerary rituals. But the artist also shows that cemeteries become *places* which can be regarded as sacred, in that they act as a focus for the pilgrimage of friends and family and are protected from activities deemed 'disrespectful', or secular space, with sites intended to serve the whole community, closely integrated into community history.

The be-all and the end-all of *Pantonecropolis* lies in the artistic and humble acknowledgement that if the beautiful is limited, the sublime is limitless, so that the mind in the presence of the sublime, attempting to imagine what it cannot, has pain in the failure but pleasure in contemplating the immensity of the endeavour. Death becomes photography.