

## Spanish Pantheon in Rome. A permanent abode

BY ÁNGELA GARCÍA DE PAREDES

The Spanish Pantheon in the Campo di Verano was entrusted to three resident artists at the Academy of Spain in Rome in 1957: architects José María García de Paredes (1924-1990) and Javier Carvajal (1926-2013) and sculptor Joaquín García Donaire (1926-2003). They proposed an open space devoid of religious symbols apart from the chapels around it. This work explores a new direction that moves away from the usual funerary monument: a symbolic space composed of two planes in equilibrium laid out on a smooth platform where there is no distinction between sculpture and architecture. This place is for those who take time to pause here, a permanent abode, to spend time with the absent and the present.

### Spanish Academy of Fine Arts in Rome

The Spanish Academy in Rome has a magical ability to forge bonds between all those who have lived there since its foundation in 1873. This bond between successive generations of resident architects in the studios and galleries of the Academy defies reason. Overlooking Rome from Janiculum Hill, near Bramante's perfect Tempietto, the Academy of Rome became an escape route to Europe from Spain's closed perimeter for a few privileged architects in the 1950's. Their long two-year sojourns in Rome also gave them a close-up experience of the classical world and the historic city - a window that opened onto new architecture. José María García de Paredes (1924-1990) arrived in Rome in March 1956, coinciding with Carvajal<sup>1</sup> but after Ramón Molezún<sup>2</sup> (1922-1993) had left.

*The view of Rome from the Academy terrace is indescribable. All the pomp built up in Rome over the centuries unfolds before your eyes in astonishing wonder. The grey domes of the churches, countless heavily Baroque churches, emerge above the city's Sienna red roofs. The patches of green gardens rise up in the form of Roman umbrella pines, so characteristic, so musical...<sup>3</sup>*

This description of the view from the Academy is part of a five-page text by a journalist dispatched to Rome, Juan Ramírez de Lucas (1917-2010), which details the long history of the Academy and its illustrious residents. He focuses on the Director at the time, the Marqués de Lozoya (1893-1978), and others who went before him, including Valle Inclán

(1866-1936), and lists the artists in residence: Painting: Francisco Echaz (1927- ), Rafael Reyes (1924-1984) and José Beulas (1921-2017); Sculpture: García Donaire (1926-2003) and César Montaña (1928-2000); Engraving: Jesús Fernández Barrio (1921-2005); Music: Miguel Alonso (1925-2002); Architecture: José María García de Paredes and Javier Carvajal.

The Roman experience, journeys across Europe and the Academy's importance as a host for encounters between the various arts combined to make a powerful impact on the way these residents understood architecture and its relationship to the other arts. Valuable ongoing knowledge about the outside world gained in the Academy and its transmission to an introspective nation was the common denominator amongst the young residents who made the most of their period in residence to complete their training. Before them, Fernando García Mercadal's (1896-1985) long sojourn from 1923 to 1927 shaped a decisive link with modern European architecture, and afterwards, Rafael Moneo (1937- ), a resident between 1962 and 1965, exemplified the knowledge and value of history in his new architecture. Indeed, Lafuente Ferrari (1898-1985) described García de Paredes and Carvajal's generation as "artists of their time".

*The Academy of Spain in Rome stands atop Janiculum Hill, overlooking the city beside an old Franciscan convent whose courtyard holds a veritable gem, Bramante's Tempietto. Nobody who has been here even just once in their lifetime can ever forget the marvelous spectacle spread out at their feet of the Roman city, crowned by domes and dotted by towers. The history of Western culture is displayed here for the benefit*

*of those who are able to sense these things... The work by the current painters and architects in residence shows that solid discipline and training are compatible with talent and creativity. These descendants of a brilliant tradition also know how to be artists of their time, aspiring to produce personalized work without imitating the obsolescent.<sup>4</sup>*

### Spanish Pavilion at the Venice Biennale

Carvajal and García de Paredes were nominated as Residents at the Spanish Academy of Fine Arts in Rome by the Examination Board on 28 September 1955. The project they both competed for was the Spain Pavilion at the Venice Biennale, with a simple brief: two rooms for painting and sculpture exhibitions with their respective annexes within a 50 meter per side square. The proposed theme was close to the heart of the then Deputy Director and later Director of the Academy in Rome, Joaquín Vaquero Palacios (1900-1998), who in 1952 had renovated the old Spanish Pavilion in the Giardini di Castello, Venice. The projects by both young architects were decidedly modern. Carvajal's proposal,<sup>5</sup> with constructivist overtones, organized the spaces artistically, in continuity, installing several platforms on the ground level floor for the sculpture exhibits and resolving the building with a single roof. García de Paredes' project, with a disciplined abstraction derived from a structural module, spread outwards with walls that trap the open space with expressive wrought iron gratings, as he explains in the summary:

*The specific conditions of each room are diametrically opposed, originating in the same intrinsic characteristics - sculptural forms in two and three dimensions - as Painting and Sculpture. The former, necessarily laid on a flat base, requires constant, uniform, diffuse lighting. The latter is more flexible and requires a mass of direct, variable, strongly contrasted light in order to appreciate the plasticity of its three dimensions. Paint is very delicate, and requires total isolation from potentially harmful agents. Sculpture, on the other hand, can usually withstand such agents, and is sometimes specially designed to stand on its own, unprotected from them.<sup>6</sup>*

From his early sculptural Córdoba Chamber of Commerce and the first Aquinas, both brilliant projects designed in conjunction with Rafael de la Hoz (1955- ), García de Paredes refined the lines he drew until he arrived at an elementary expression of his forms, digging down to the source of the issue in search of the right solution, as he was to do in all his projects. He installed the Sculpture room in the outward-facing basement, extending the exhibition on platforms out towards the gardens.



01 Model of García de Paredes' proposal for the Spain Pavilion at the Venice Biennale, 1955. © JMGP archive.



02 Model of the Spanish Pantheon, 1957. © JMGP archive.

His design for the Art room was closed, superimposed on the sculpture room and top lit through modular skylights in a chessboard pattern set on a structural grid which included a sunlight diffuser and artificial lighting as well. Externally, the Pavilion was constructed with anodized aluminum panels which,

*from an expressive point of view, have the advantage of enclosing a slender, aerial structure which seems extremely light psychologically.*

The project was drawn with precise lines, cross-hatchings and shadows cast in black. The zigzag mesh of the roof grid, enveloped peripherally by orthogonal planes, was not manifested on the flat, quiet facades of the building, which brought the structure to the surface in a similar way to his subsequent work on churches in Almendras and Malaga.

The project summary continues:

*Its personality as a representative Spanish building in the international competition in Venice requires a careful choice of elements which can individualize and characterize it as an image of our current Architecture. It is based on the idea of updating a supremely traditional aspect of Spanish art with an exquisitely delicate treatment. For this end, we have outlined two strong vertical planes in wrought iron which border the main sides of the Pavilion. They create veiled transparencies and partially block the view of the interior from the outside. A stone shield—perhaps taken from an old palace in Salamanca or Ávila—, a metal lintel in a vivid color and a black flagpole highlight and define the main entrance to the Pavilion.<sup>7</sup>*

It is not clear whether the stone shield proposed for the entrance, “perhaps taken from an old palace”, set above a free-standing metal lintel, should be regarded as an artefact like the cherubs on the facade of the Church in Malaga, included to facilitate the building permit, a collage, or a reference to history in a modern building which does not wish to ignore the past. The plane marked by the

iron fence sieves the view of the interior and frames the entrance courtyard, brings to mind the brass and steel fence in the subsequent project for the Roman Pantheon.

### Grand Tour

The projects for the Venice Pavilion by these two architects in residence sowed the seed of a collaboration which began in Rome in 1956 with the construction of the Spanish Pantheon and the 11<sup>th</sup> Milan Triennale, and continued with Our Lady of the Angels church in Vitoria (1958-1960) and the School of Telecommunications Engineering in Madrid (1960-1964).

The Academy in Rome consolidated not only a deep friendship but also acquaintances with other artists and architects met during the Milan Triennale and their Grand Tour of Europe in the company of Vaquero Turcios in August and September 1957, after completing their work on the Spanish Pantheon.

The constant journeys taken by Academy residents around Italy and Europe were a great source of information and understanding about the situation outside Spain. Carvajal and García de Paredes were no exception. They visited locations and buildings in many European countries and gained first-hand experience of the continent's new architecture. Their documents, letters and memoranda contain further details about their Grand European tour, which was planned on the basis of the arrangements they made at the Milan Triennale in July to visit work sites of other participants, as the Memorandum for the Academy explains:<sup>8</sup>

*Under the Spanish Academy's regulations for architects in residence during their second year in Rome, we received funds to undertake a thorough, detailed study trip through Austria, West Germany, Denmark, Sweden and Finland, returning through Denmark and East Germany to Berlin and ending in Belgium and France. The priceless opportunity of such a trip is without a doubt the most interesting experience of any architect's two years stay here. It fills out our experience of the classical sediment and the serene harmony of*

*Italy's historic legacy with knowledge about the current European architectural situation.<sup>9</sup>*

The tour was decidedly modern. García de Paredes, his wife Elizabeth Falla (1932-), a young Joaquín Vaquero Turcios (1933-2010) and Carvajal somehow crammed themselves and their luggage into García de Paredes' car, a brand new white SEAT 600, for a journey of several thousand kilometers in August and September 1957. The photographs of the Grand Tour reflect a great journey through the history of European architecture by young enthusiasts on a sort of forerunner of an Erasmus scholarship, building multipolar relationships with people in the countries they visited and forging a close bond with each other that was to last forever.

### Spanish Pantheon

In November 1956, García de Paredes, Carvajal and sculptor García Donaire were invited by the Ambassador to the Vatican, Fernando Castiellax (1907-1976),<sup>10</sup> to design the Spanish Pantheon in the Campo di Verano cemetery. The three young residents, immersed in the Roman atmosphere, worked closely together with enthusiasm and dedication on an unexpected commission that brought the integration between architecture and sculpture to life.

Although both architects were awarded a two-year scholarship period in Rome in 1955, they coincided at the Academy from March 1956 until the summer of 1957. The preparation and design of the project was therefore done jointly, while the construction and detailed work, blessed in November 1957, was monitored more closely by García de Paredes, as evidenced by newspaper articles and successive photographs of the site works.

The draft project for the new Spanish Pantheon was presented to the Spanish Ambassador in January 1957. Drafting of the detailed plans started in April 1957, and their work on the Pantheon was completed in Rome's intense July heat, after returning from the official opening of the Spanish Pavilion at the 11<sup>th</sup> Milan Triennale. Carvajal went back

to Madrid at the end of the European tour. In early November, they were awarded the *Triennale Gold Medal* and immediately afterwards, on 10 November 1957, the Pantheon was officially opened. On March 3, Spain's ABC newspaper published a long essay by the Academy Director, Juan Contreras, Marqués de Lozoya, about the Pantheon project and the Spanish burials in Rome. The historian provided a detailed description of the burials that had taken place in Rome, noting that,

*The ancient Spanish Pantheon in a city which can boast the most lavish funeral scenery in the world – where any Patrician or citizen before or after Christ gave instructions for their buried in tombs that a king would envy for his final resting place – consisted of a simple marble tombstone.*

He went on to explain the origins of the commission awarded to the three residents at the Academy, and described the project and its symbolic meaning:

*Today's architecture seeks beauty in the precise proportions between the masses and a balance of lines, always contingent to its architectural function. In its disdain for superfluous ornamental fronds, it is highly appropriate for expressing the Christian idea of death as a liberation from matter.*

The Marqués de Lozoya's article was also published in *L'Osservatore Romano* on 11-12 November, coinciding with the opening of the Pantheon, in this case translated into Italian as *Architettura e nel nuovo scultura Mausoleum degli Spagnoli*. It was preceded by a news item about the Pantheon blessing ceremony presided by the Bishop of Teruel and the mass in the nearby Basilica of Saint Lawrence outside the Walls. Surprising, the Italian text by the Marqués de Lozoya, like the ABC article on November 10, made no mention of the joint authorship by Carvajal, by then back in Spain, just as some more recent essays fail to mention García de Paredes. The documents about this delightful work preserved in García de Paredes' archives in the form of clippings, photographs, sketches and letters, reveal the truth about the dates and authorship. All three Academy residents were involved in the project from the initial ideas to the actual project for the new Pantheon in the Summer Field cemetery, on a site where, since 1944, there had only been a large crypt covered by a simple marble headstone. In 1952, this was the burial place of philosopher Jorge Ruiz de Santayana.<sup>11</sup> They embarked on a thorough study of his work in search of an idea that could be interpreted artistically. "Christ has given us access to the glorious

freedom of the soul" were the words finally chosen to be etched forever on the concrete wall of the Pantheon.

In April 1956, García de Paredes took several beautiful pictures on his visit to the ruins of Hadrian's Villa and the Forums in the company of García Donaire and Miguel Alonso, a musicologist also living at the Academy. He already knew that he wanted to create a scenario for the Pantheon that would blend architecture and sculpture, without the latter being a mere appendage or ornament. And so the Spanish Pantheon in Rome was designed by García Donaire, Carvajal and García de Paredes as a perfect union of the two arts, matching the ideas of the three residents manifested in an open space, a courtyard free of religious symbols other than those of the surrounding chapels. In this project, they explored a new direction in which the result was distanced from a funerary monument, and instead became a symbolic space composed of two planes in equilibrium, laid out on a smooth platform. They debated the importance of Santayana and the most appropriate form for the crosses in honor of those who were buried there. The crosses were finally merged with the concrete wall on one side of the Pantheon: multiple intertwined crosses with small ledges jutting out for offerings and flowers. On the wall, the hands that tightly grip the base gradually release their hold as they move up García Donaire's sculpture, opening up to the sky in the form of doves. There is no distinction between where the sculpture begins and where the architecture ends on this concrete wall, or whether or not the horizontal plane of the Pantheon is actually a podium to rest two sculptures, one in concrete and the other in steel mesh, as García de Paredes explains in his Memorandum for Grand Prix of Rome.

*I have approached the complex issue of the relationship and adaptation between the visual arts and architecture as a social factor of a spiritual nature. There is undoubtedly a close relationship between them, and their most flourishing periods have coincided over the centuries. Today there is a healthy trend moving in the same direction. However, if this union is to be perfect, we need to be aware of the trends in the auxiliary arts, their techniques and the problems and aspirations of their creators. This is the only way to shape a team of men striving for a common goal, with shared aims and ambitions.<sup>12</sup>*

Today it is hard to find the Pantheon amongst the Roman pines. Almost nobody remembers where it is. Following the guard's instructions, traveling through time, one finally arrives at the small opening in the reinforced concrete wall with powerful chiaroscuros

and a beautiful iron and bronze gate. The vertical planes are set on a taut horizontal plane, reminiscent of the items arranged in the Forums which form a unitary whole. Stepping onto this 10 x 7 meter horizontal plane, we discover a travertine pavement broken down into rectangular pieces, reminiscent of church tombstones, and a sense of being in an unroofed room between two different walls, one opaque and the other an iron fence on which a few bronze pieces glitter when scanned by the eye. This precinct is exposed to the sky of Rome, like a garden, with views of its cypress trees. It has same sense of tranquility as a Mediterranean home. Interior and exterior merge and the Campo di Verano and the burials disappear from view, in the words of the Marqués de Lozoya, "...in a life that is no longer troubled by the fear of death". Nevertheless, I prefer to think of the Spanish Pantheon as a beautiful open room in a garden where you can see the sky and listen to the birds and the silence, a place which is more for those of us who take time to pause here, a permanent abode, to spend time with the absent and the present.

As Ramirez de Lucas said of the Pantheon,

*Life is a form or mode of matter; the soul is a suite of characters by virtue of which there is a certain equilibrium. All these capital ideas of Santayana's philosophy have been captured in the hardest of all interpretations: architecture. The beauty of a monument or a work of architecture in general does not reside in its size, its cost or its rich, sumptuous materials. It lies in something more simple, poetic and difficult: the harmony of proportions, the skillful play of volumes, the surprise of the resolution and the originality of the result.<sup>13</sup>*

Perhaps in the same way that modern architecture managed unwittingly to bring beauty to the simplest and most mundane places, it also brought a sense of tranquility free of monumentality to monuments. In this case, a Pantheon – the Spanish Pantheon –, a monument *par excellence* in architecture, is transformed into a beautiful permanent abode.

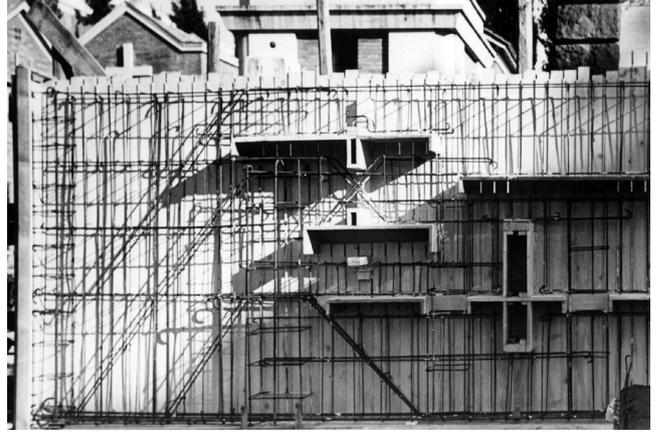
The photograph taken by García de Paredes in June 1956 of the House of the Faun in Pompeii depicts a similar scene: an open space contained between two walls, one closed and the other open, revealing a garden. Even more to the point, the courtyard of Aalto's experimental house in Muuratsalo, with one side transformed into a grating that permits views of the pine forest, has similar dimensions to the Pantheon: 8 x 8 meters. The architects' journey to Finland in Autumn 1957 included a visit to Aalto's work, which reaffirmed the human factor they were seeking for the Pantheon,



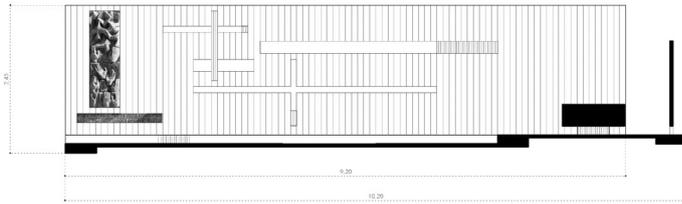
03 Spanish Pantheon in Rome. © Amanzio Farris, 2014.



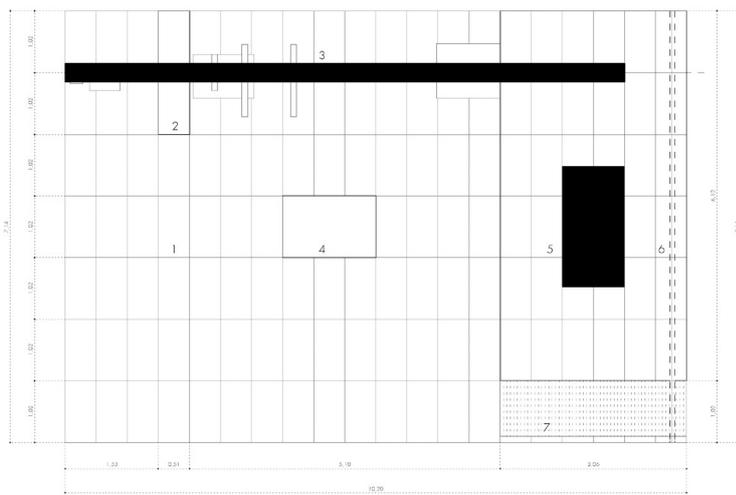
**04** García de Paredes' studio at the Fine Arts Academy, Rome, 1957.  
© JMGP archive.



**05** Spanish Pantheon in Rome. Construction of concrete wall, 1957.  
© J.M. García de Paredes, JMGP archive.



SECCIÓN



PLANTA

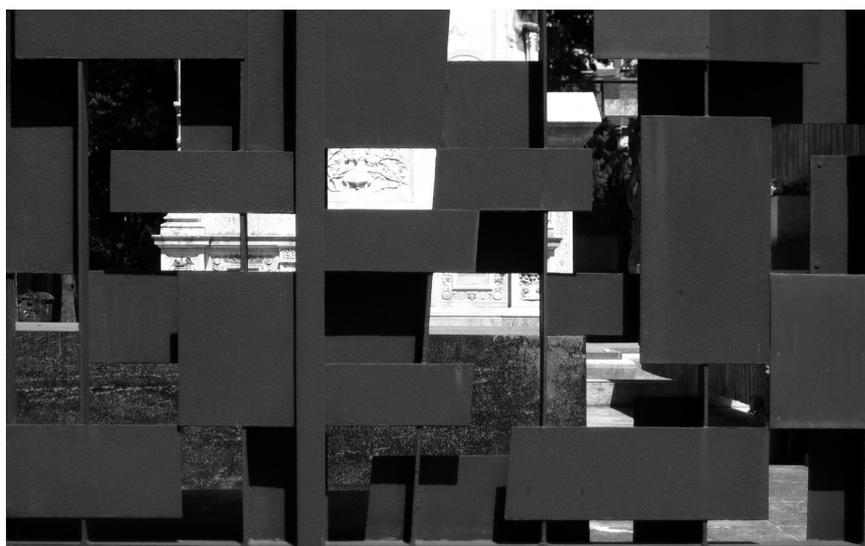
- 1. LOSAS DE TRAVERTINO
- 2. LÁPIDA DE JORGE SANTAYANA
- 3. MURO DE HORMIGÓN ARMADO
- 4. ACCESO A LA CRIPTA
- 5. ALTAR
- 6. VERJA
- 7. ROSALES



**06** Spanish Pantheon, plan and elevation. © JMGP archive.



07 Spanish Pantheon in Rome. © Amanzio Farris, 2014.



08 Detail of bronze and iron grid. © Amanzio Farris, 2014.

as García de Paredes mentions in his Roman Memorandum,

*Each one of Aalto's buildings shows his concern for the human factor in architecture. He is achieving new technical progress which proceeds from psychological investigation. He does not begin from a grand theory like the rationalist masters, but rather a great love and exhaustive analysis of the little problems of everyday life.*<sup>14</sup>

The famous words of Santayana also come to mind, "Those who do not remember the past are condemned to repeat it."<sup>15</sup> The three Spanish authors were probably not thinking so much about the past as a promising future, anticipated by this work in Rome.

#### Notes

- 1 Javier Carvajal (1926-2013) was awarded a scholarship in Rome for the period between 1955 and 1957, and García de Paredes between 1956 and 1958. His nomination by the Examination Tribunal as an architect in residence at the Spanish Academy of Fine Arts in Rome was announced on 28 September 1955.
- 2 Ramón Vázquez Molezún (1922-1993) was an architect in residence at the Rome Academy between 1949 and 1952. In 1950 he was awarded the Gran Prix de Roma for the St. James votive lighthouse project in Galicia, and exhibited three pictures in the Spanish Pavilion at the 25<sup>th</sup> Venice Biennale, entitled "Bologna", "Padova" and "Verona". He formed a close friendship with García de Paredes, two years his younger, while they were studying at the Madrid School of Architecture and lived at the Ximénez de Cisneros College and then the Dominican Residence in the Virgen de Atocha Basilica. After García de Paredes returned to Spain from Rome, they collaborated on several projects and competitions in the company of the architects based in Bretón de los Herreros Street, including the interiors for the Brussels Pavilion in 1958, the Almendrales township between 1958 and 1964, and the competition for the Madrid Opera House in 1964.

- 3 Juan Ramírez de Lucas, "En el Janículo se crea en español", *El Español*, 482, 23 February 1958.
- 4 Enrique Lafuente Ferrari, Forward to the Catalog of the exhibition *Resident Painters and Architects in Rome, 1955-1959*, Circulo de Bellas Artes, Madrid, 17-30 April 1959.
- 5 The plans and photos of Caravajal's model for the Spanish Pavilion at the Venice Biennale are held in the University of Navarre General Archives.
- 6 José María García de Paredes, *Memorandum for the Spanish Pavilion at the Venice Biennale, 1955*.
- 7 *Idem*.
- 8 Study tour of Austria, Germany, Denmark, Sweden, Finland, International Building Exhibition (INTERBAU) in West Berlin, Belgium and France. The purpose of this trip was to study the latest architectural achievements in the field of housing, urbanism, school and religious buildings, and industrial design and applied arts to the needs of modern life. It included, among others, the following cities: Innsbruck and Salzburg in Austria. Munich, Stuttgart, Mannheim, Frankfurt, Mainz, Koblenz, Bonn, Cologne, Hanover, Hamburg and Berlin in Germany. Aarhus, Middelfart, Odense, Roskilde, Copenhagen and Helsingor in Denmark. Hålsingborg, Kalmar, Södertälje, Stockholm and Uppsala in Sweden. Helsinki, Hammelina, Pori, Noormatkuu, Abo (Turku) in Finland. Liege, Brugges and Brussels in Belgium. Rheims, Sedan, Paris, Chartres, Tours, Angoulême, Bordeaux and Marseilles in France.
- 9 José María García de Paredes, *Memorandum of Architect in Residence at the Spanish Academy of Fine Arts in Rome*, March 1958.
- 10 Fernando María Castiella was ambassador to the Vatican from 1951 to 1956 and Minister of Foreign Affairs between 1957 and 1969. He therefore presided the official opening of the Spanish Pantheon in November 1957 as a Minister.
- 11 Jorge Ruiz de Santayana (1863-1952), philosopher, poet and writer, raised and educated in the United States, where he taught at Harvard. He died in Rome, where he wanted to be buried.
- 12 José María García de Paredes, *Memorandum for Spanish Academy in Rome examination*, 27 April 1955.
- 13 Juan Ramírez de Lucas, "Here lies Jorge Ruiz de Santayana", *Diario Arriba*, 10 May 1959.
- 14 José María García de Paredes, *Memorandum of Architect in Residence at the Spanish Academy of Fine Arts in Rome*, March 1958.
- 15 Jorge Ruiz de Santayana, *Reason and common sense*, first of 5 volumes in the series *La vida de la razón*.

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