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Museo Casa de la Memoria (Medellín) | courtesy of the Museum

THE HOUSE OF MEMORY MUSEUM (MEDELLÍN) AND MEMORY AS PAST-PRESENT

Miguel Cardina

In his book *The Museum of Innocence*, Orhan Pamuk imagined a museum as if it were a house. An intimate space where history could be glimpsed through a patchwork of fragments of daily life. An idea, perhaps, more appropriate for biography, in all its diversity and richness, than for producing and reproducing the epic discourse of the nation. Can a museum be a home?



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The *Museo Casa de la Memoria* (MCM), located in the centre of Medellín (Colombia), assumes this possibility in its very name. Created in 2006 and inaugurated in 2011, the *Museo Casa* – ‘Museum House’ – is the initiative of the City Council, part of its programme for victims of the armed conflict in Colombia. The public listening process that followed established the demand for a house and a museum: a space that met the urgent need for a meeting place – felt first and foremost by the victims and their families – but that could also address the urgency of exposing and discussing the phenomenon of violence so that it could be overcome.

The circumstances in which the MCM works require some reflection on the nature of the memory and on the political, pedagogical and moral role it plays. Indeed, the museum’s mission is underpinned by the idea of overcoming atrocities whose effects persist, and in trying to avoid them happening again. “Memórias vivas,” one of the museum’s most often-deployed expressions, does not only call on us to dwell on the persistence of the past in the present, whether in testimonies of the living or in certain social phenomena; it also reminds us that the conflict has not yet ended and that the dynamics of symbolic recognition and reparation coexist with conflict. Indeed, despite the ongoing peace agenda, clashes continue between guerrillas, paramilitaries, the state and drug traffickers, in a Colombia where armed conflict has caused more than 200,000 deaths and, according to the Single Victims Registry, has directly affected more than 8 million people.

Although the MCM deals with a specific thematic and geographic context, its activities lead us to reflect on the imbrications between memory, art and territory more broadly. It is important to emphasize the peculiarities of Medellín: the most violent city in the world in the early 1990s, a place marked with the stigma of drug trafficking and that grew with the forced displacement of populations from elsewhere. Medellín has been recently rediscovered internationally, even as Pablo Escobar has been glamourized on the television. In this context, the territory of Medellín itself remains marked by violence experienced at different social and human levels. The transmission of violence, even among the younger generations, is grounded in lived experience. This forces the Museum to deploy a somewhat diffuse notion of “victim” which can make visible those whose lives have been shaped by distinct, partially expressible, forms of violence.

The proposal of the museum is thus to use memory as a reflective tool to resignify this past-present and to open space for shared and plural ways of recounting what happened. This is clear in the



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permanent exposition *Medellín: Memories of Violence and Resistance* and – even more obviously – in the participatory construction of the *Geographies of the Truth* exhibitions (which was open to the public until August) and *Medellín ES* (currently open, and which will have a second part opened at the end of September). A living museum connected to its community, the MCM has made the appeal to artistic expression a fundamental axis of its work. As its director Adriana Valderrama affirms, the poetic and the artistic make visible what hegemonic silences or the force of single narratives tend to understand as merely subjective.

Translated by **Alexandra Reza**

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