

RADAR

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The goodbyes

Since 2004 the artist Catalina León works to shape a research project whose aim is to own a cemetery. Designed especially for those who do not agree with a particular cult and do not feel represented by the "deals of the moment", the idea is that individuals can realize their tomb idea or memorial. Far from the aesthetic pretension of decorating death to continue denying it, the winner of the Petrobras Award in the latest edition of Arteba, seeks to create a space for dialogue and reflection. Of sincerity and intimacy. Her interest in the subject led her to serve as a volunteer in the care of terminally ill at San Camilo Hospice adding a life perspective to having a cemetery. Also in the past three years she traveled to Mexico to familiarize with the feast of the Day of the Dead, participated of the Iberoamerican Heritage Cemeteries and Funerary Art Congress directed by architect Catalina Velásquez Parra and currently continues to investigate and, as part of this, studies in the Fundación Vocación Humana by Doctor in Philosophy Bernardo Nante. Interviewed by Radar, León explains her project and reflects on the subject.

By Catalina León

"We are going to die. And thinking about it or not, will not advance or delay our death. Sometimes we have the superstitious illusion that by not talking about death we are able to keep it away and not only is this very unlikely to happen, but it also ends up transforming it into a fantasy in our daily lives.

One day our body that breathes and hugs today will stop doing so. And possibly before this happens we will go through the death experience of a loved one. Thinking about death can certainly fill us with fear and anguish. It is also likely for what we feel to depend on our belief system. But it is not a suffocating thinking I'm referring to, or try to evoke when I speak about death, or when I think of my own death. It is rather a kind of humble acceptance. A thinking that, beyond the sadness, can open the doors to a deeper sense about our lives and how we are living it.

And then, we bury our dead. We have this need and that is something that constitutes us. We need ordering rituals that allow us to assimilate what we do not understand and, without explaining or removing the veil of the mysterious, give us a sense of re-union with the transcendent. We may believe it is a necessity of primitive man, and then settle for stuffy rituals, preset that sometimes border on tedious bureaucratic procedure. But once dead, the people who love us and mourn us are going to bury or cremate us not only for a sanitary issue but also for an undeniable spiritual need. And perhaps it might be a tiny contribution, but a contribution in the end, the re-establishment of a relationship between who we were and how we are seen off. I know that this will in no way lessen the pain we feel. But maybe it will give us the possibility to assimilate and resignify the loss.

Currently the cemeteries and funeral homes range from a golf course or a semi-abandoned building entrance. In other cases, a little more luxurious, it is quite close to the

aesthetics of a furniture sale house. I guess that this similarity in part suggests that the pain of others is also big business. This fact is pretty unhappy. Of course it is right that is profitable and worthy of recognition as any job.

So I imagine my cemetery as a halt in the maelstrom of the contemporary world. A space to retrieve another conception of time. A park filled with trees and tombs as diverse and unique as the people buried there. And I cannot know how these memorials will be, or the rituals that will accompany them, because the idea is that each person creates his own with absolute freedom. The idea is also that there is a cremation pyre and not a furnace. A carpenter shop, an orchard and a central house that besides tackling everything that involves a funeral, somehow works as a meeting place, a place of dialogue, containment and exchange of ideas that not only have to do with death but also with other areas of life, since the basis of the project is that: the integration of death as a fundamental part of life. I know that is a bold project and it would probably take several years to be realized. Many times as I outline it I am afraid that it might be misunderstood and fall into an empty form or as a purely decorative detail. But at the same time I keep the enthusiasm of thinking that perhaps creating one's own symbol and elaborating our own death, with all the depth and commitment that it implies, we can start to have a life more conscious, more real. "