

## ALMERÍA EN LA MIRADA de José María Mellado

José María Mellado has returned to Almería to walk through it once again. On this occasion - which is certainly not the first - he has taken his gaze as a seasoned and wandering photographer for a walk through the streets and the most genuine neighborhoods of his hometown. The result of this calm and meticulous journey is made up of around twenty images that form a spectacular montage based on large canvases that can be seen in different parts of the capital of Almería.

From this work you can admire not only the usual quality of its photographs, but also the curious game it proposes. Indeed, Mellado has placed these images along a route of about three kilometers that crosses the streets, squares, corners and plots of the neighborhoods where the city arose and its oldest urban settlements originated: from the Alcazaba and the Chanca- Pescadería, passing through the Historic Center-Almedina, until reaching the streets surrounding the Center; that is, the entire network located approximately to the west of Paseo de Almería. These are precisely the areas on which the Camina Project acts, within which the exhibition is framed. This project was born with the intention of eliminating barriers between different neighborhoods of Almería through cultural activities, making theaters, streets, monuments and museums meeting points for all residents regardless of their place of origin. In short, as the fond reader will remember, it is about trying to break that kind of curse that José Ángel Valente pointed out in a distant 1996 article; There the Galician poet who wanted to live among us denounced that psychological border that separated and stopped the access of the inhabitants of Almería to certain areas of the city that he considered dangerous or degraded, preventing the civic exchange of everyone with everyone.

José María Mellado's contribution to this proposal is reflected in this open-air exhibition that can be enjoyed throughout the year in different spaces in the old part of the city.

I was talking before that the photographer proposes a kind of game to us on this tour. And this results from the perfectly planned fact that the images he has made appear slightly decontextualized. That is to say, the author has placed his photos at points other than the place from which they were taken, and by doing so he demonstrates at the same time a truly remarkable sense of composition and visual instinct. In this way, the panoramic views and perspectives produce an effect of surprise in those who see them, helping them to look at the city with new and renewed eyes. Suddenly, a square surrounded by buildings looks out onto the width of the immense sea, a forgotten or unnoticed bend takes on an unusual significance, a barren lot appears filled with flower pots, or a crude or dilapidated façade lets itself be crossed by the afternoon sky. with seagulls at which perhaps some girls look out smiling. Thus, as we have pointed out, a playful sense emerges, sometimes not exempt from irony and even melancholy.

We knew about José María Mellado not only his unquestionable merits accumulated over several decades of rigorous and recognized photographic work, but also his pioneering drive within the field of digital photography. Nor are his pedagogical skills and desire for travel unknown, be it cabotage, long distances or exotic destinations - Cuba, Iceland, Vietnam, Japan, New Zealand, etc. - always with his belongings on his shoulder and his gaze ready for the visual adventure. But now he has walked through the streets of his city again, he has become our neighbor again and he shows us who are his countrymen, as well as visitors from outside, a handful of images of another possible or impossible Almería to walk through. the look. And they come out to meet us, encouraging us to accompany them through the corners and squares of the old city on a path that, as the poet wanted, can only be done by walking.

José Luis López Bretones