

LIMESTONE

What ideas first popped into your head when you were given this task?

For a while, my work has focused on stone and the different ways it's used in Galicia, trying to avoid the most common – as a raw material for building – and recording the most unusual. These include rituals and beliefs that use it as an element, its limited usage because of its weight and volume, and its recreational application in sport such as rock climbing. Hence, from the outset, I searched for connections between the Way and rock. I was initially interested in the Holy Door opening ritual, which takes place on the eve of the Holy Year, whereby a flimsy stone wall collapses after the Archbishop of Santiago knocks on it. This symbolises the opening of the Holy Door and is only accessible in Holy Years. But as this year, 2021, the ritual has changed and the part involving the stone wall has been omitted, I dismissed the idea of working on it. At the time, I was researching and I came across the occurrence my work Caliza focuses on. The Codex Calixtinus notes that the pilgrims would pick up a limestone rock, which they transported to a kiln near the town of Arzúa, where it was processed to extract lime that was then taken to Santiago to make the mortar used in the construction of the city's Cathedral. Interestingly, in the latest works carried out in the Cathedral of Santiago, lime mortar is being re-applied, replacing the concrete that was used for years and which was thought to be more suitable than lime. Over time, experts have come to reconsider lime mortar as the most suitable material to bond stone blocks. Lime mortar transpires, it's more durable and it's anti- bacterial. These characteristics make it more suitable than cement.

We can therefore say that a certain level of collective work was involved in building the Cathedral of Santiago?

It fascinates me why a pilgrim walking the trail in the 10th or 11th century for spiritual reasons would bend down to pick up a rock more than 110 km from their destination and transport it all that way to contribute towards the building of a temple. And how that gesture became a collective movement of such magnitude that the first book to focus on the Jacobean pilgrimage echoes this. This small gesture, which at the time was insignificant, became a collective movement that made it possible to build one of the cathedrals with the most devotees in the world. How does the commission fit in with your usual practice, and have you changed your usual working process for this project? The main obstacle I faced with this task was fitting it in. I combine commercial and personal work. Due to the urgency usually required for commercial work, I try to avoid rush in my personal projects. As this project had a specific deadline, I had to adapt. In any case, the work processes haven't changed with regard to other projects I've developed previously. I've had time to do research prior to taking the pictures, thanks to which I could arrive at the places to be photographed with a clear vision, and the editing time has been ideal.

Your project looks from an artistic perspective at fragmentary elements of the Way of St James. How do the fragments operate in terms of the idea of the Way of St James? Has your perspective on the Way changed after carrying out this project?

If I look back, I see that my work is mostly related to a journey or a trip. But this Way was not made up of elements that progress in a linear fashion, but by fragments containing the different themes I register in a non linear fashion. I think this is something that is repeated in Caliza. The different elements photographed or filmed provide information to form a whole. The journey is not reported directly along the line that marks the Way, but if you put the parts together, somehow, it shows a formal rather than a spatial journey. Regarding the second matter, I have the perspective of someone who has been living in Santiago de Compostela for twenty years, and for the last ten, I've been living next to the last stage of the Silver Route. Furthermore, I've carried out a range of commercial work in the field of advertising. Therefore, I had a specific route in mind, close to the representation that is made

to promote the Way. Now, after making Caliza, I have found a layer, linked more to raw materials and work, of which I was previously unaware. I've discovered that the Way served as a transport route for raw materials used in the construction of a temple, and the pilgrims, in a sense, were workers and means of transport. It was a layer I didn't know about.

What is the relationship with the material deployed in your project?

Limestone as a raw material is the main element of the piece. The different parts of the video show different processes related to it: extraction, processing, cataloguing, representation. As I mentioned before, I'm really interested in the idea that the medium, the Way, the stakeholders and the pilgrims all had different roles to what I thought. A spiritual pilgrim trail becomes a task and a route to supply raw material for building, and the pilgrims walking it in some way are the suppliers of a raw material used to construct a building with a very powerful symbolism.

What role does photography and video have in your project?

For many years now, I have been recording both with video and photography. At times, I decide to just use one, but I rarely stick to my initial plan. In the specific case of Caliza, from the start I was told that the exhibition was going to be in projection format, so I made the video recording. Almost without realising, I also started taking photographs; at times when I'm doing localisation and research work; sometimes when I've finished the video recording, mostly in the form of notes. Finally, and once more, I find that I have three recording formats (video, sound and photographs) that will be applied to the different formats (exhibition, publication).

*Conversation between Nicolás Combarro and Iván Nespereira (Santiago de Compostela, 2021).