

II THOSE TRASTOS VELLÓS A HERITAGE TO BE DIGNIFIED

He knew, and was aware, that what a few years ago was a way of life and its material means would disappear (...). Peasants rejected, in a drastic way, all traditional means. What they considered old-fashioned made them break with the past, for the sake of misunderstood progress. It is paradoxical that a social group, always reluctant to any change, conservative in both customs and habits, should be changed in such a short time by the deafening noise of the mechanical mower.

(...) They associated their previous, obsolete ways of working with rustic backwardness, renouncing anything that might be linked to the tradition of their grandparents and parents.

José María Xaveiras Escanlar

Because of his work in the metal workshop, Pepe often visited the houses of the council, where it was common to find abandoned tools and equipment. With no definite idea yet of what to do with them, he began to collect pieces that, having lost their use, had become old junk or "trastos vellos", condemned to abandonment or fire. He collected them mostly from stables, sheds and dumps, sometimes with the more or less express authorisation of their owners, sometimes simply because of their indifference or incomprehension.

In a context characterised by geographical, linguistic and social marginality, by late mechanisation and by deficient public services and communication routes, the intention of recovering the tools and the household goods destined for the bonfire was often considered a foolish or silly endeavour. Years later, he would recall with irony how his return to the workshop after assembling what he considered "marvellous pieces" was accompanied by the laughter of those behind him who commented "ta tolo".

In this embryonic phase of the collection, the idea that the pieces, detached from the artisans who made them, from those who used them and from their uses and symbolism, are no more than mere objects devoid of meaning. They only acquire their true significance as bearers of the intangible heritage that they transmit and which allows them to be interpreted and contextualised.



Working with "old junk" in his metal carpentry workshop.



With his father, "Benino del Fervreiro" repairing a cart wheel.

Pepe's natural curiosity was not limited to rescuing ethnographic pieces. From the outset, his vision of heritage was comprehensive, transcending the mere accumulation of artefacts by a collector to take an interest in production processes, the structure of the territory and the recovery of trades, activities, techniques and cultural manifestations. His collecting work extended to knowledge, know-how and cultural forms that were being lost at an even faster rate than the material repertoire.

It was not only the most recent history that was his sole focus. Thanks to his efforts and at his own expense, some of the most important pieces of the council's prehistory were recovered for public enjoyment and knowledge and are now on display at the Museum of the Chao Samartín Fort. His intervention was equally decisive in making the site known to the scientific community, which would eventually lead to the archaeological excavations that have turned Chao Samartín into a scientific and heritage reference point.

