



# A Drawing, a Map. Subjective Cartography of the Territory. The Monastery of San Paio in Ribeira Sacra

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**Abstract.** This research examines a work methodology on the graphic representation of historic landscapes, using the case of the ruins of the monastery of San Paio in Ribeira Sacra. The study is based on the creation of novel cartographies of the remains of this architectural complex and its vineyard-filled landscapes, based on the graphic interpretation of existing documentary and photographic archives. The drawings made establish a correlation between the landscape and the architecture of the monastery, combining science and intuition with the personal accounts of this heritage. This gives rise to a conceptual map based on the superimposition of times and events, a display of experiences which make up a landscape interpreting the memory of this location. At its core, this paper proposes a broader reflection on the use of representation, combining archival information with the subjective recording of architecture and landscape. Driving this work we find an approach to history with space for many different documents and realities, which cartography should be able to elucidate, shape and interpret.

**Keywords:** Scientific and intuitive cartography · Cultural landscape · Phenomenological representation · Ribeira Sacra · San Paio

## 1 San Paio and the Landscape

Landscape can be seen as the result of a series of actions which transform nature, a series of correlations between the elements which shape a territory. There is a direct correlation between how landscape and its transformations are perceived, and the emotions it stirs in the spectator, which suggest different ways to explore a landscape and its architecture, combining subjective interpretation with archival documentation and in-situ data collection.

The work presented here is a study on the cartographic representation of perceptive and phenomenological matters of the landscape (Santos and Álvarez 2017, pp. 132–141), of the ruins of the Romanesque monastery of San Paio (12th c.) in Ribeira Sacra

in Galicia. It includes the development of its individual visual expression and graphic language, part science and part intuition, to understand and represent this historic architecture and its agricultural context (Fig. 1).



**Fig. 1.** Ruins of the monastery of San Paio with the terraces of vineyards in the background, valley of Abeleda (Ribeira Sacra) 2017. Photograph: José Manuel Franco Córdoba.

Ribeira Sacra is a landscape of craggy slopes, with vineyards, an abundance of water and stone terraced constructions forming a unique agricultural territory. Its religious buildings and small villages (López 2018) distributed throughout the Sil and Miño river basins, make it into one of the places in Europe with the highest concentration of Romanesque religious architecture. The monastery of San Paio, near the town of Abeleda, is located in a landscape known as “bocarribeira” (Pérez Alberti 2015, p. 17) given its location on the edge of the river canyon and the surrounding flatlands. This land has been completely transformed since the Roman era with the cultivation of vineyards on staggered terraces in the landscape, built using stone walls known as *socalcos*. The geometry of the walls built an abstract landscape on the mountains. The origins of these walls date back to the middle ages when the first constructions of this type appeared in Croatia to cultivate vines. Later, in the 11th century, Cistercian monks used this system of terraces to cultivate vines near Lake Geneva. It spread through several regions of Italy (Liguria, the Aosta Valley or the Amalfi coast), and through other islands such as Madeira and Lanzarote, forming spectacular terraced landscapes. This ingenious way of transforming natural land into productive space, proposing the coexistence between the agricultural landscape, terraces built in stone, and different individual ways of life (Quintáns Eiras 2018) (Fig. 2).



**Fig. 2.** Wine landscape of Ribeira Sacra. (Source: <https://www.elcorreogallego.es/tendencias/ecg/ribeira-sacra-optara-declaracion-patrimonio-mundial-unesco/idEdicion-2019-04-05/idNoticia-1175382>. Date: May 2019)

In this context, architecture arises from a relationship with production cycles, infrastructures, pre-existing elements, and material, as well as with the environment and its physical surroundings. The result is a landscape brought about by the connection and influence of factors of different origin. These are situations in which architecture learns from agriculture, as it could do from archaeology or nature.

The aim of this research was to examine the cultural landscape of San Paio (classed as a cultural asset), by drawing up a new cartography of the abandoned ruins of the monastery and its integration into a landscape of vineyards in surroundings of great heritage value. The recording process carried out makes it possible to document elements contributing to the preservation of the territory and the valorisation of this historic architecture and its relationship to the residents of Abeleda.

The graphic research was carried out as part of the Cultural Programme *12 Miradas Riverside* promoted by Laboratorio Creativo Vilaseco from A Coruña, whose main objective is the promotion of research and creativity in the fields of art, architecture and visual arts, using the landscape of Ribeira Sacra as a setting (Fig. 3 and Fig. 4).



**Fig. 3.** Ruins of the monastery of San Paio in Ribeira Sacra. Inside of the church. Photographs: José Manuel Franco Córdoba.

## 2 The Collage Map

Geographical thought is historically linked to travel. The city views of the cartographies of Braun and Hogenberg, the Universal Cosmography of Münster, Ramusio's Navigations and Travels, the *Theatrum Orbis Terrarum* by Abraham Ortelius, or the maps by Lafreri, are representations of the city which attempt to relocalise the world and its parts (Farinelli 2007, pp. 30–42). The mediaeval cartographer Piris Reis drew places based on oral descriptions and accounts from travellers who brought architectural fragments from faraway lands. Representations not only of the city, but what we imagine of it.

The conceptual map presented here is a set of gazes constructing a mental representation of a landscape and its architecture, a collage map correlating the ruins of the monastery of San Paio with the agricultural landscape of vineyards, stones and groves of its surroundings in Ribeira Sacra. A drawing made up of real images and images from history transformed into complementary scenes of a single location. In this collage map or composite map, the monastery of San Paio is represented through a path organised by the drawing of a landscape, a line of history, times and spaces, all interlinked with the experience of the visitor and memories evoked by randomly placed architectural fragments and remains which are integrated within nature (Miralles 2019, pp. 34–45) (Fig. 5).





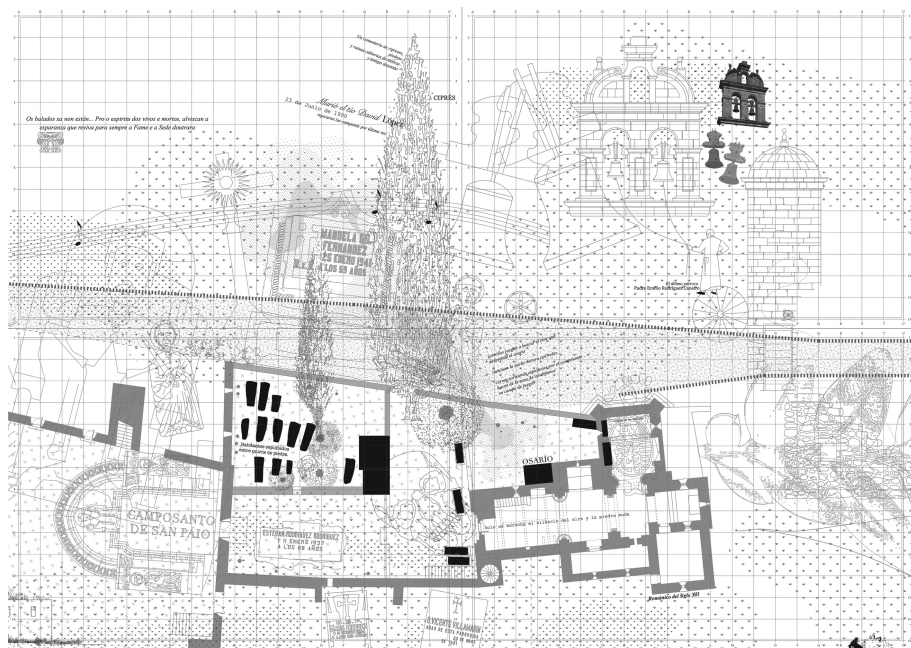
**Fig. 4.** Ruins of the monastery of San Paio in Ribeira Sacra. Garden of the walled cemetery 2017. Photographs: José Manuel Franco Córdoba.

This study proposes a way of exploring a territory and its architecture, combining the experience of walking with archival research. This process establishes a relationship with the history of the soil, place names, vine growing, stone, and architectural ruins. The place itself fascinates the local residents and creates a collective imagery, constituting a global “archaeological” reading which merges intuition with a creative interpretation of its history.

The conceptual map shows how, regardless of space and time, the important and irrelevant barely differ: the shapes and dimensions of the monastery with the structure of the vineyards; the walks between stone walls that lead from the town to the river, with the paths and tracks between crops and our own walks through the ruins; the silent echo of the stone walls and the light in the valley of time; the fortunes of a place with a tragic history... You simply need to stop on a point of the map to be carried away by its lines, ultimately reaching the opposite side, with the view of the wanderer across the roofs of the town of Abeleda, glimpsing the vineyards, the cypresses and the ruins of the monastery of San Paio, imagining that behind this landscape one can find fragments merging stone and nature, prone to dissolving and disappearing into contiguous shapes and matter.

In this conceptual map the architectural complex of San Paio and its landscape are interpreted as the collision of elements scattered throughout a borderless territory without limits, advancing in step with fields of crops. A drawing made of other drawings, or to be more exact, of fragments of drawings of San Paio, and even of

dislodged fragments of the landscape of vineyards and stones on different scales. Composition/decomposition is not objective nor does it aim to carry out a linguistic reconstruction. It rests on the meaning that modern culture can give to the legacy of history, which is interpreted from fragment and experience (Fig. 6).



**Fig. 5.** Fragment of the drawing *Cartografia subjetiva del monasterio de San Paio* showing the monastery and the burial sites in the context of the landscape. Drawing by the authors, 2019.

Drawings prompt the question: “what is a landscape nowadays for us?” The answer is found in the meaning we attach to certain objects and elements, and to the relationships and influences they have on the territory and evolution over time. In this case, there is also an experience when confronted with the architecture in ruins of the monastery taken over by a nature of increasing beauty and wonder. What remains of the landscape of vineyards and stones in the foundation of the town of Abeleda and in its architecture? The interest of this conceptual map lies not so much in its faithful representation of the context, but in the monument’s ability to evoke, as happened with Le Corbusier amid the ruins of Villa Adriana, the memories of which he later transferred to the project of Ronchamp chapel, transcending classifications and historic styles. In this study, the drawing of Paio is a scheme of imagery born from the evocation of the history of a place using superimposed information and data relating to architecture and events. A composite drawing, like Venetian atlases, containing the fruits of experiences and physical records from walks. There is therefore no difference between the scientific and interpretative dimensions of its content.

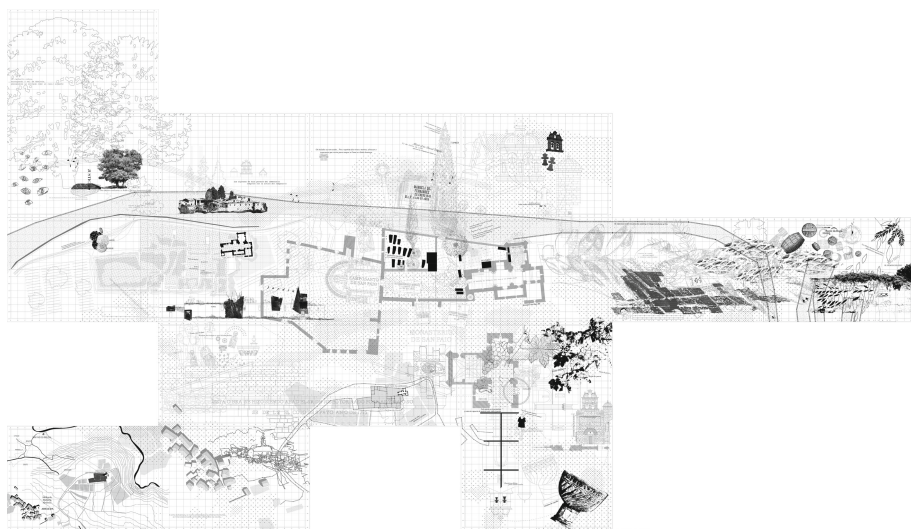
The interpretation of this subjective cartography is synchronic. Its visual presentation shows physical elements of the territory and its history, alongside other emotional ones shown at a unique point in time, that of the viewer, to produce the image of the place. The different symbols, plots and graphisms used reveal the strata or layers which make up the conceptual map. Jointly or individually they offer different types of information, establishing new links or vicinities between architecture and nature, leading to a new order in which certain situations arise from shifts between these two environments. The remains of the monastery, between bush and trellised vines, can be seen as elements of art and construction of the landscape, simultaneously emotional and rational.

The drawing of the conceptual map is a spatial scheme of imagery whose interpretation proposes different ways to explain the place and history. The drawings of topography, paths and vegetation of the town of Abeleda itself or of the monastery define a specific geographical place which has been given a new meaning through fragmented objects and texts evoking memories of San Paio. Drawings and words created from experience build a map which, although devised with cartographic precision, alters physical reality to the point where it goes beyond the limits of the format.

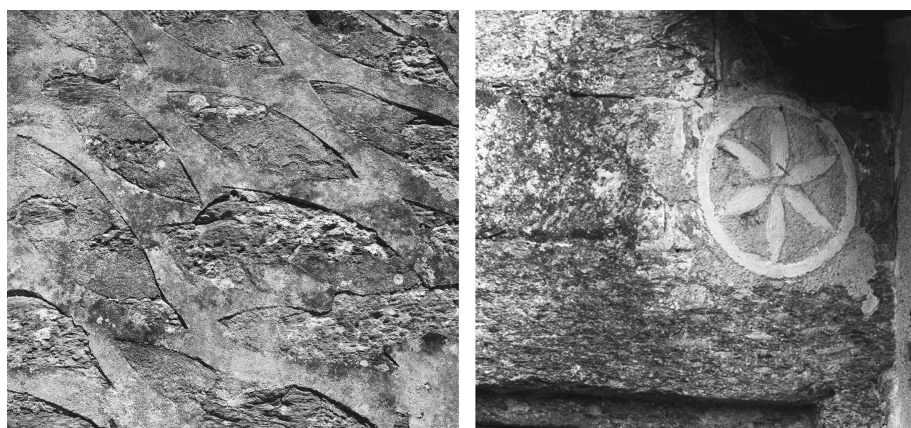
The resulting cartography spreads with no defined shape, carried away by the shapes of the place itself. The borders of the map represent different levels - paths that go up and down - spreading through the territory to provide an intuitive topographical notion when the graphic document is viewed. The town of Abeleda is located on the lower part of the map, and can be seen from the elevations where the monastery stands, taking on a central more prominent position on the drawing, more developed form and architecture through the walls on the floorplan. There are also sketches of the textures of the terracing to be used for cultivating vines in the "heroic" agriculture practiced throughout the region. The river Edo closes the map towards the south, appearing in its current position to the west of the monastery and dragging casks and plant motifs in its waters.

The interpretation of the landscape of the monastery is completed with an inventory of identifying elements which store the memory of San Paio. Beside them, fragments of the history of the monastery and the place are superimposed with fragments of smaller individual stories: a baptismal font, reliefs in the columns of the main altar, grave stones found in the cemetery, vines and local residents. Each of the seventeen plates which make up the relational map is in turn configured as an independent network which delimits areas or quadrants in the map, and organises the document by theme, as a sum of partial landscapes. The series as a whole provides a complete overview of the territory interconnected through plant drawings of the vines that abound in the valley, the ivy and vegetation which took their place after they were abandoned, and which spread across the seventeen plates. At the same time, these drawings are the result of the repetition of decorative elements directly taken from the monastery of San Paio, and reminiscent of the sgraffiti of the granite walls also found in the vernacular architecture of Ribeira Sacra. Occasionally, these sgraffiti were made with patterns with sinuous white lines, and at other points, with figurative drawings of leaves and animals, or repetitive geometrical patterns, all with "lime outlines" to cover the stone façades. This constructive technique, which is highly valuable in heritage terms, is no longer used

and guarantees waterproofing, as well as providing a specific aesthetic to the walls (Quintáns 2018) (Fig. 7 and Fig. 8).



**Fig. 6.** *Cartografía subjetiva del monasterio de San Paio.* Drawing by the authors, 2019. Dimensions: 252 cm × 148.5 cm.



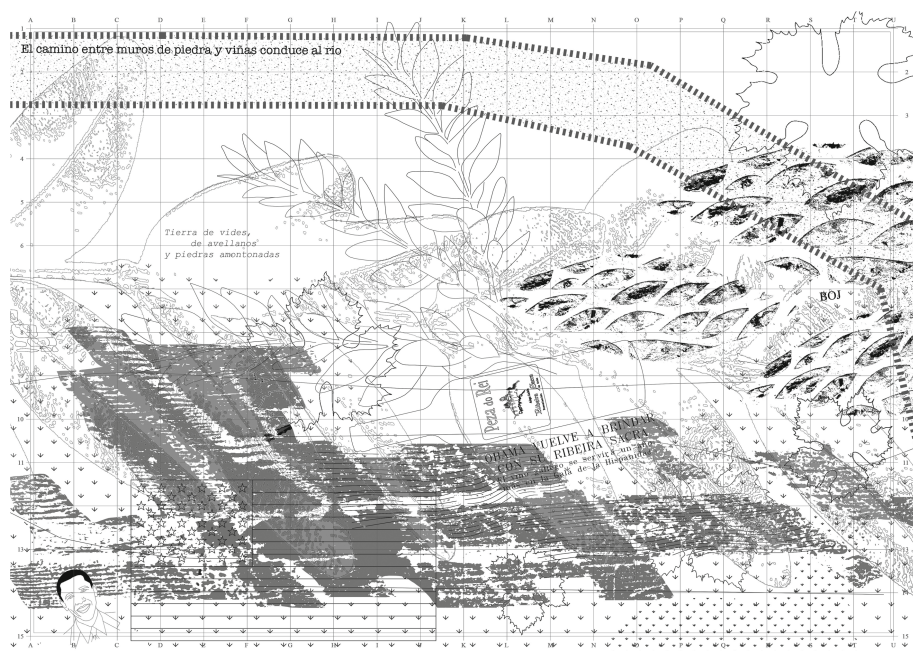
**Fig. 7.** Sgraffiti on the walls of the monastery of San Paio, 2017. Photographs: José Manuel Franco Córdoba.

The conceptual map also incorporates geographical comments with historic and ethnographic notes on the places and architectures which appear in it. Text, drawing and image are a block of knowledge which provides clues to bring us closer to what the



drawing is attempting to convey. There are names of places, architectures and descriptions of events. Poems and place names which describe history past and present: “justice is on a rock in the esplanade of oaks and maples”, “the gaps in the ruin blend into the vineyard”, “the inside is an empty shell”, or “you can only hear the silence of the air and mute stone”. There are also enigmatic expressions: “the landscape is in the soil” or “I will give you all this”. There are some expressions relating to experiences, and even evocative aesthetic thoughts, defining this landscape as “gardens of stone under the rain”. All these expressions are taken from the bibliographical archives of the monastery and the conversations about this place and its landscape held on the walks with the residents.

Despite the uncertainty prompted by the map a selection is made of a series of characteristic elements for establishing a geographical interpretation of the territory based on the combination of two aspects of classic cartography in the birth of the modern atlas. The first aspect is geographical and it refers to the *topos* of the place and an orientation advancing from north to south, which sets off from San Paio to travel through the fragments of ruins, vines and trees to reach the nucleus of Abeleda. The second aspect is interpretative. It begins with a global interpretation which then moves on to an examination of parts or fragments of architectural elements on different scales and referencing history, activities, name places of sites, and characters. This map resembles an updated Portolan Chart. It does not aim to produce an identical reproduction of the world and its order, but to create a modern selective cartography representing an anthropological and subjective interpretation of the territory, whose closest reference might well be in the outlined marks of Galician petroglyphs. These large stones, placed along certain paths are thought to be “magic” in Galicia, as they are full of finds, megaliths and even churches of different religions. Petroglyphs are archaeologies of the landscape, engraved stones placed spontaneously to guide shepherds through the paths they frequent. The drawings engraved on the stone are abstract geometrical elements: labyrinth-like symbols, hollowed-out cups, cross symbols, spirals and circles, and figurative motifs from nature: deer, horses, human figures or hunting weapons which could be connected to the location of the natural resources of the territory. The scenes do not depict everyday activities nor do they narrate major events. They are symbolic hieroglyphs reflecting profane and religious aspects of the mentality of their age. The mystery they transmit is linked to representative abstraction and its location, with no apparent order or justification. In some cases, they can be placed to define territorial limits, to indicate places of special significance, or even placed in a chain to visually trace transit lines, resulting in a series of routes in the territory which make up an invisible map correlating elements and events. The first settlers probably sketched the location of these marks on the landscape intuitively to create limits or identify strategic positions to allow a more in-depth knowledge of the inhabited location, leaving enough tracks to sense the history of their customs and ways of life. This way of placing elements scattered on a territory draws real or imaginary elements representing the position of physical elements, events or symbolisms. Recording this information on a drawing promotes the knowledge of the place through the experiences linked to it, events from different eras which are superimposed on a single physical space. In short, a way to record the memory of a territory (Moreno 2013) (Fig. 9).



**Fig. 8.** Fragment of the drawing *Cartografía subjetiva del monasterio de San Paio* showing the drawings of vine leaves in sgraffiti from the walls of the monastery on the agricultural landscape. Drawing by the authors, 2019.

The maps in themselves are landscapes built in layers containing the past, present and future of a place. No other historical document has the ability to simultaneously narrate what has happened at different times. In a way, this *Cartografía subjetiva del monasterio de San Paio* is a conceptual map which responds to the contemporary interests which seek a broadened view of every place, involving a drawing that is a hybrid of data collection and the interpretation of memory - an inventory of elements, situations and events which follow a spatial and temporal order (Rochi 2013).

This collage map or conceptual map is articulated around 17 A3 formats, with an irregular shape which is a response to the relationship the monastery establishes with the town and landscape. A single ink has been used when drawing it, employing a mixed technique with calque, printing, photocopy, photography, free-hand drawing and digitalisation. The drawings of box, maple or oak leaves are extracted from plant samples, and the textures of the stone are obtained through stone rubbing of the monastery walls. Photographs and photocopies of the gravestones, of the frieze of the main portico of the church, of the decorative motifs in lime, or of the images carved in stone make it possible to create digital drawings of these elements superimposed onto the photographs, combining both representations. There are also some 3D models of objects, such as the stone from which judgements were given, comprehensive surveys



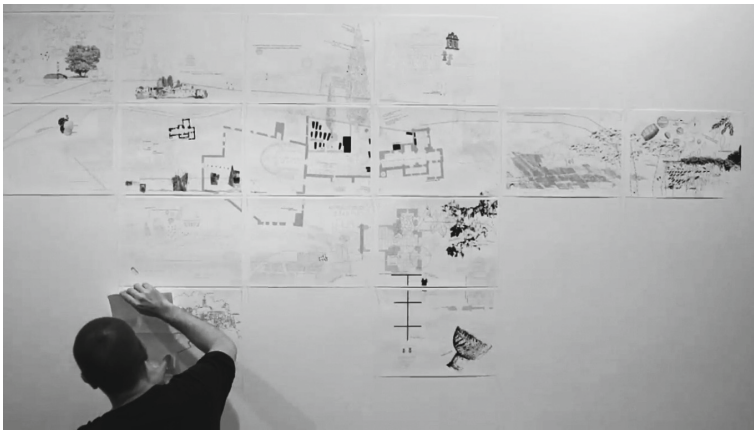
**Fig. 9.** Drawings of symbolisms in the Petroglifo os Carvallos (Author: Manuel Santos Estévez. Source: [https://www.researchgate.net/figure/Calco-del-petroglifo-de-Os-Carballos\\_fig1\\_28100658](https://www.researchgate.net/figure/Calco-del-petroglifo-de-Os-Carballos_fig1_28100658). Date: September 2019)

of floor plans, elevations and sections of architectural elements, maps of contour lines, as well as handwritten notes and diagrams drawn on site. Drawing makes it possible to create a relational map which conveys a complex reality, between memory and experience, through an eclectic faceted representation which is as fragmentary as the content examined. This is a representation which even exhausts drawing and uses other complementary media, such as a literary composition of place names relating to San Paio, a catalogue of numbered photographs of the surroundings of the monastery, or an audiovisual archive documenting the place itself and the representation processes carried out.

### 3 Conclusion

The study proposes a way to explore the cultural landscape of Ribeira Sacra and its architecture, combining the experience of walking with archival research, in a process which correlates history, place names, vine growing, stone and the architectural ruins of the monastery of San Paio, along with the fascination sparked off by this place in the collective imagery of its residents, to globally configure an “archaeological” reading combining intuition with the creative interpretation of its history.

The resulting graphic document is a relational map which, as is the case with atlases, constitutes a valuable tool to record the history of a place and its avatars. The drawing of San Paio is a visual form of knowledge and a specific way to contemplate this territory, drawn and erased constantly by our gaze. At the same time, among its lines it holds an aesthetic paradigm and epistemic paradigm of knowledge. The combined superimposed drawings on this space of Ribeira Sacra in fact subvert the established forms of traditional representation of this landscape and can incorporate the sensory, diverse and multiple dimension of experience. The result of the conceptual map is a cultural vision of the ruins of San Paio and its vineyard landscape from different perspectives: relating to architecture, landscape and phenomena which together make up a display of the past and present of the place. A set of representations which help preserve the memory of a territory and its history for a moment (Fig. 10).



**Fig. 10.** Assembly of the drawing *Cartografía subjetiva del monasterio de San Paio* in Galería Vilaseco in A Coruña for the exhibition *12 Miradas Riverside*, 2017. Photograph: web Galería Vilaseco <http://www.vilaseco.net/>.

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