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Reconstructing the Alhambra: Rafael Contreras and Architectural Models of the Alhambra in the Nineteenth Century

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Abstract

Many models of the Alhambra survive today in major museums and institutions worldwide. Most of these were made by the head restorer of the Alhambra Rafael Contreras, who carried out a major restoration in the Nasrid palace between 1847 and 1889. He aimed to change the look of the Alhambra to create a more “Oriental” building. Parallel to his works on the building, he created a successful business based on architectural models and plaster casts of the Alhambra, reviving old Nasrid plaster techniques and introducing new ones. He sold these objects as souvenirs to the many

tourists who visited the palace in the nineteenth century, especially from Britain, thus spreading his own vision of the Alhambra.

KEYWORDS: Alhambra, architectural models, restorations, Rafael Contreras, plaster techniques

Attractive for its combination of exotic Islamic ruins and its “picturesque” inhabitants, Granada was a mandatory stop on every romantic journey of foreign travelers, and the Alhambra was the focus of their Oriental fascination. It is well known that the Nasrid Palace became the most famous “Moorish” monument in Europe in the nineteenth century.¹ Although its influence had been noticeable since the eighteenth century, it was not until the next century that the Alhambra gained its reputation as the paradigmatic model of a romantic building. Its evocative exterior, high on the hill overlooking the city, and its mysterious inner courts created the perfect context for visitors to indulge in the Oriental dream. This was particularly attractive for British travelers, who visited Spain after the Peninsular War (1808–14), as we will see later. This article will focus predominantly on the reception of the Alhambra in Britain. Specifically, it will examine the architectural models of the Alhambra, which were produced by Rafael Contreras from 1847 onward, and their significance in the reception of the palace in Britain. In order to explain the “success” of such models, it is helpful to outline the perceptions of the Alhambra in the period prior to Contreras’s activities.

During the 1830s, Spain became the subject of numerous travel books, drawings, engravings, and paintings, most of which featured the Alhambra. To the romantic mind, Spain was the perfect destination. Largely unspoiled by industrialization, the country offered the chance to discover a traditional culture, medieval ruins, and an “Oriental” heritage. There was a specific interest in the Nasrid building that led to different types of works, both for popular and specialist audiences.² Washington Irving’s *The Alhambra: A Series of Tales and Sketches of the Moors and Spaniards* and Richard Ford’s *A Hand-book for Travellers in Spain, and Readers at Home* were landmark publications that brought the Alhambra to a wide readership in Britain;³ and the paintings, prints, and drawings by artists such as David Roberts (1796–1864) and John Frederick Lewis (1804–76) visualized the palace for British audiences from the 1830s onward. These works (published in the 1830s and 1840s) reflected an increasingly enthusiastic attitude toward the Nasrid palace in nineteenth-century Britain. Thus, from the 1850s, there was a rise in the number of visitors, who arrived in Granada looking for the fairy-tale palace they had read about in travel books.

In contrast to the romanticising view of the Alhambra created by writers and artists, architects motivated by the interest in “Oriental” architecture developed a more scholarly and systematic approach, which focused on the study and hypothetical reconstruction of the architecture and design

features.⁴ This is represented especially in the works of Girault de Prangey (*Souvenirs de Grenade et de l'Alhambra: monuments arabes et moresques de Cordoue, Séville et Grenada, dessinés et mesurés en 1832 et 1833*), 1837, and Owen Jones and Jules Goury (*Plans, Elevations, and Details of the Alhambra*, 2 vols., 1842–1845).⁵ Jones studied the Alhambra in depth. He first traveled to Granada in 1834 with the French architect Jules Goury. On this trip they studied and analyzed every design feature of the Alhambra, and discovered traces of color pigment on the surfaces of the building.⁶ Their study of the decorations of the Alhambra and the function and purpose of color in its architecture was of great importance in the development of modern design theories. Jones's publications, along with the construction of the Alhambra Court at the Crystal Palace in Sydenham (1852–4),⁷ made the Alhambra even more popular among nineteenth-century artists, architects, and designers, who were attracted by the adaptable decoration and the experience of color in architecture that it provided.⁸

In contrast to this positive international reception in the mid-nineteenth century, the historical appreciation of the Alhambra in Spain had been inconsistent. Following the conquest of Granada by the Catholic Monarchs in the fifteenth century, the palace became one of Spain's royal residencies, yet the authorities neglected it over time. When the Bourbons visited the Alhambra in 1730, they raised concerns about the delicate state of the wall paintings.⁹ Interest in the building was further heightened following the founding of the Real Academia de San Fernando de Bellas Artes in 1744. From the 1860s onwards, the Academia sent several delegations of artists to Granada to study the Alhambra, resulting in the *Antigüedades Árabes de España*, published in two volumes in 1787 and 1804.¹⁰ The work consisted of elevations, drawings, and sections of the Alhambra, with the aim of gathering as much information as possible from the Nasrid ruins.¹¹ This early academic interest did not lead to any immediate remedial works, and the Alhambra remained in a very poor condition at the beginning of the nineteenth century. This was partly the consequence of the unstable political situation following the French occupation of Spain (1808–1814),¹² but it was also due to the little interest in the conservation of the complex on the part of the Granada and the Alhambra authorities, led by Ignacio Montilla, the Alhambra governor, who was more interested in his own personal enrichment than in the conservation of the complex.¹³

Prior to the French invasion, work carried out in the Alhambra was minor, amounting only to sporadic interventions when this was necessary, due to the lack of funds allocated by the government to maintain the Nasrid complex.¹⁴ During the French occupation of Granada (1810–12), authority over the Alhambra fell to the French general Horace Sebastiani (1771–1851) who planned intensive restoration work, which was only partly carried out due to lack of time. This embellishment was intended to adapt the palace to the French taste, and it was strongly criticized at the time, as we can see from the account of the palace by Lord Andrew Thomas Blayney (1770–1834), a British general captured at the Alhambra in November 1810:

Some of the apartments have been fitted up in the modern style by Sebastiani, which is certainly no proof of his good taste, for a Parisian salon or boudoir in a Moorish palace-five-hundred-year-old, is almost as absurd as dressing an antique statue in the costume of a modern *petit maître*.¹⁵

When the French troops withdrew, they left behind them a trail of disaster and ruin, because not only had they looted the palaces, they had also decided to blow up some of the towers of the Alhambra before their departure.¹⁶ The situation was not much better after their retreat. A continuing lack of funds and the continued use and adaptation of parts of the palace by local people (for dwelling and commerce) left the Alhambra palaces in a complete state of devastation. As noted above, however, the early nineteenth century saw an increase in the number of foreign visitors to the Alhambra, many of whom were highly critical of the condition. For example, in the *Hand-book for Travellers in Spain and Readers at Home* (1845), Richard Ford complained about the devastation of the Nasrid palace and the lack of interest on the part of the local government in caring for the Alhambra, which he had visited in 1831.¹⁷ Such criticisms by Ford and other authors prompted the authorities to take a more serious interest in the preservation and restoration of the Nasrid palace. The concern was determined by both economic and nationalist reasons, because the authorities realized that the building was a major focus of foreign interest, and the influx of visitors was vital to the city's economy. But they also noticed that Spain's Islamic past could be a significant political tool for securing for Spain an important status in Europe. The Islamic past was something unique that differentiated Spain from the rest of Europe.¹⁸

Spain's appreciation for the Islamic past masked a nationalist aspiration that viewed Spain's medieval Muslims as an integral part of Spain's history. This evaluation of Spain's Islamic past had a twofold impact on the arts: on the one hand, the Islamic-style buildings, such as the Alcazares in Seville and the Alhambra in Granada,¹⁹ were restored. On the other hand, the Islamic past became an inspiration to contemporary artists and artisans in Spain and around the world, who produced art and artifacts inspired by the Alhambra, such as the famous "Alhambra vase" designed by Joseph-Théodore Deck (1823–91) for the universal exposition in Paris in 1867.²⁰ These two aspects came together in the work of Rafael Contreras, who benefited from his position as head restorer of the Alhambra while at the same time running a private industry based on the sale of Alhambra plaster casts and miniatures.

A New Phase for the Restorations

Fostered by this environment of renewed attention toward the Islamic past, a new phase of restorations commenced in the Alhambra in the 1830s. The discovery of a new technique called "*apretón de barro*," or

“clay stamping,” was key to the progress of the works.²¹ In the medieval period, the Nasrids had produced the plaster ornamentation that covered the interior of the Alhambra using two techniques: casting and carving of plaster.²² While the carving technique remained, the casting plaster technique was lost after the expulsion from Granada of the last skilled artisans in the sixteenth century, and it was not recovered until the nineteenth century. According to Juan Parejo, governor of the Alhambra at the time (1836–44), two French artists brought this method to Granada in 1837.²³ According to my research, these were the Pisani brothers, of Italian origin but working in Paris, who traveled to Spain in 1837, commissioned by the French government to copy the decorations in the Alhambra.²⁴ Later, in 1840, the Pisani brothers advertised the sale of several casts they had made at the Alhambra:

Messrs Pisani brothers, casters and sculptors, have the pleasure to inform the public, particularly Messrs artists, that they possess a collection of forty-three fragments of various Moresque ornaments. All these fragments have been moulded from originals at the Alhambra Palace, in Granada, by Mr. Pisani, their brother, employed on the molding works that were carried out in Spain, in 1837, on behalf of the French government.

These fragments, whose dimensions vary from six inches to two feet and longer, have been chosen among the most precious ones from the wonderful ornaments in the Alhambra.

Wanting to make available the acquisition of the Collection to artists and everyone who is interested in owning it, Messrs Pisani have decided to organise a subscription system; each subscriber will receive the entire collection of forty-three fragments, all at once, at the price of 100 fr.²⁵

It is possible that the Pisani brothers made these plaster casts at the Alhambra as part of the project orchestrated in 1830 by King Louis Philip I (1773–1850) and managed by Baron Isidore Taylor (1789–1879), to form a collection of Spanish art for the Galerie Espagnole at the Louvre Museum.²⁶ According to Juan Parejo: “the French artists gave us the ‘plaster’ recipe, whose production was unknown until now.”²⁷

This technique involved working clay in the right proportion of water and earth in order to press it onto the ornaments on the wall and thus obtain a mould (Figure 1). Once this clay was dry, it was removed from the wall and used to make a positive in plaster, thereby creating a copy of the original decoration.²⁸ This discovery dramatically changed restoration work at the Alhambra, because it reproduced the old Nasrid technique, which enabled copies of the wall decorations to be made.

Perhaps the most interesting phase of restorations began in 1847, when Queen Isabella II (1830–1904) appointed Rafael Contreras (1824–90) as “restorer *adornista*” after he presented her with a three-dimensional scale model of the Alhambra’s Hall of the Two Sisters (Figure 2),²⁹ a subject to which I will return shortly. He worked in the Alhambra until 1889, and his approach as a restorer only focused on the Alhambra’s wall surface, substituting original decorations with new plaster casts made in his workshop using the recovered technique. His appointment coincided with the authority’s desire to restore the Nasrid Palace to its “former glory.” In a letter to Rafael Contreras dated October 23, 1847, Queen Isabella detailed the way in which she wanted Contreras to pursue the restorations:

[...] That he should work especially on the restoration of the decoration of this marvelous souvenir of Spain, bringing it back to the original form that it had at the time of the Conquest when the Catholic Monarchs waved the banner with the cross [...] The Queen wishes to equal her ancestor Isabella I who conquered the Alhambra, becoming thus the Queen who restored it to its former glory.³⁰

With this letter, Queen Isabella praised the importance of the Alhambra as an instrument of propaganda, as a symbol of Christian triumph, and entrusted Contreras with the difficult task of translating her vision of a glorious past onto the reconstruction of the Alhambra. She also showed her interest in the Alhambra and its design features, commissioning Rafael Contreras to create an “Alhambra room,” the “Gabinete Árabe,” in the royal Aranjuez Palace, which he built between 1848 and 1851.³¹

Rafael Contreras and Decorative Restorations

Contreras’s family was in charge of the restoration works throughout the nineteenth century. His father José was the architect at the Alhambra from

Figure 1

“*Apretón de barro*” technique, being carried out by the Alhambra restorers following the nineteenth-century process. Photograph by Ramón Rubio Domene.



Figure 2

Rafael Contreras, *Exterior and interior view of the architectural model representing the Hall of the Two Sisters in the Court of the Lions, Alhambra*. Made in plaster, paper and wood, 194 × 109 cm, 1847. Museo Arqueológico Nacional collection, Madrid. Photograph by Asun González Pérez.



1840 to 1845, and his son Mariano was the director of restorations from 1889 to 1907. They all followed a restoration approach that prioritized decoration over the structure, and they made changes to the Alhambra in order to match the “Oriental” image created for the palace by romantic writers like Irving.

Among the most controversial work that the family carried out was the complete demolition of the *Sala de Camas* (or Hall of the Beds) in the royal baths in the Comares Palace. Between 1843 and 1866 they rebuilt it with new plaster casts, made and colored in their workshop according to Rafael’s idea of the Nasrid decorations. The polychromy adopted in this room was based on the primary colors, and was strongly influenced by Owen Jones’s color theory of Nasrid architecture.³² This space is where Contreras tested the new restoration techniques and laid down the basis for his orientalizing restoration: “It was very important for us that this mysterious room, maybe the one with a most Oriental character, was not lost, and we can say that here we carried out the first restoration tests.”³³

Another controversial intervention was the substitution of several gabled roofs in the palaces with colorful tiled domes, to give them a more Oriental look. In the 1860s Contreras converted the roof of the eastern pavilion in the Court of the Lions into one of these domes. He also filled most of the gaps in the decoration on the walls of the Alhambra with motifs that did not necessarily belong there. The Alhambra that Contreras first experienced in the early decades of the nineteenth century was almost a ruin, and most of the plaster decoration on the walls was lost. Contreras and his team decided to recreate all of the decorations on the walls, filling in any blank spaces, and reproducing decoration in places where they were missing.

All of these misinterpretations were the result of the fact that Contreras’s knowledge of the palace and of the Nasrid style was very superficial, because he was educated in classicism.³⁴ He had the idea that “it is better

to make a small error of assessment than to unreservedly abandon a monument to its ruin.”³⁵ This absence of scientific criteria created a completely new Alhambra, changed to look more “Moorish” in order to attract more visitors.

Rafael Contreras and Architectural Models

At the same time, Rafael Contreras and other artisans from Granada soon realized that the attraction of visitors to the Alhambra was also an opportunity to make money. Photographic studios and plaster reproduction workshops were set up around the Alhambra,³⁶ providing tourists with the perfect object to remember their trip. The reduced scale models representing parts of the Alhambra, pioneered by Rafael Contreras (Figure 3), were visual interpretations of the Islamic past that had strongly influenced him. He had grown up in the Alhambra, helping his father José, and began to produce models in 1847, starting with the model of the Hall of the Two Sisters, as part of his plan to show Queen Isabella II the improvements in the Alhambra in the new style of restoration. This model was based on Contreras's idea of how the space would have looked in Nasrid times. He therefore added decorations that had been lost and painted the entire space following his own interpretation.³⁷ The Queen was very impressed with this model, and suggested that Contreras should continue his work as model-maker.³⁸ He then decided to continue the production of reduced scale models, representing the most important Islamic buildings in Spain. Initially, these were made as part of the project suggested by the Queen, and were produced at the Alhambra's restoration workshop. But then he developed a business selling such models as souvenirs for tourists, and decided to establish a private workshop near the Alhambra, with skilled artisans helping to produce the models.

The models were produced on a reduced scale, usually 1:12, and depicted the most famous spaces in the Alhambra, such as the Court of the Lions and the Comares Palace. Most were two-dimensional representations of a window, a door, or a balcony, but there were also three-dimensional representations of a whole space, such as the models depicting the eastern pavilion at the Court of the Lions. They were made from plaster, alabaster, and wood, and could be colored or uncolored. They did not have an inventory number, but Rafael Contreras usually signed them, either with an inscription on the front or with a label on the reverse.

Although at first sight the models seem to represent a specific wall or façade in the palace, if we analyze them closely we can see that they were made according to the same pattern as the restorations. The models show all of the wall decorations in an unblemished state, because Contreras's workshop filled in the gaps to create a more complete vision of the palace, as they did in the restoration. Most of the models are thus not exact copies of the original monument.

Figure 3

Rafael Contreras, *Architectural model inspired by a window at the Mirador de Lindaraja in the Court of the Lions, Alhambra*. Made in plaster, 63 × 34 cm, ca. 1870. Private collection, London. Photograph by Gonzalo Salcedo.



Because the models were based on his restorations, collecting them led to the spread of the fictitious idea of the Alhambra that Contreras constructed. In the models, Contreras did not want to show the real condition of the Alhambra, or its original form, but the ideal archetype of the Orientalist Alhambra that was so popular among European visitors and represented the “glorious past” of Spain. These models were the visual and artistic response of Contreras to a European trend, using his own artistic license in the absence of any academic criteria, and merely based on his idea and experience of the Alhambra.

The models were made according to a system by which the artisan reduced an individual motif to the correct scale—usually 1:12—on paper,

and this drawing was then transferred to a block of plaster and carved into it (Figure 4).³⁹ A mold was then made of this carving, allowing the motif to be copied repeatedly (Figure 5). The final architectural model was formed by placing these individual elements in much the same way as type blocks were organized in the old letterpress printing system, creating a complete wall by putting its individual pieces together like a puzzle. With the different individual motifs, one could build an infinite number of models that resemble a specific façade, but when looked at closely these do not in fact represent the original. Consequently, not only did these models encapsulate the idea that Contreras had of the Alhambra, they also misleadingly represented sections that did not exist in the actual palaces.

Following the success of Contreras's workshop, others began to be established near the Alhambra. The lack of concern for fidelity to the original monument was even more pronounced in these other contemporary workshops. Most of them did not have skilled artisans such as those working for Contreras, and they were located outside the Alhambra, so their knowledge of the palaces was limited.

Figure 4

Carved miniature used to produce a model. Made in plaster, 10 × 7 cm. Patronato de la Alhambra y Generalife Collection, Granada. Photograph by Asun González Pérez.



Figure 5

Mould to produce miniature decorations to construct the models.
15 x 6 cm. Patronato de la Alhambra y Generalife collection, Granada.
Photograph by Ramón Rubio Domene.



These other workshops, active between the 1870s and the 1930s, included that of Enrique Linares, which combined Alhambra models and photography (Figure 6), Rafael Rus Acosta (Figure 7), and that led by Diego Fernandez Castro, which combined furniture and models (Figure 8). Although their models were more cost-effective, the Contreras workshop remained the most famous among tourists, no doubt due to his position as head restorer of the Alhambra and the knowledge and access to the building that this position provided.⁴⁰

Collecting Alhambra Models in Great Britain

In Britain, the taste for Islamic Spain was stimulated by the pioneering publications on Spain of the 1830s and 1840s, and especially by Jones's promotion of "Moorish" design as the most superior of all Islamic styles.⁴¹ As a result, Alhambra models became very popular among British travelers as souvenirs of trips to the Alhambra.

Lady Elizabeth Herbert (1822–1912) visited Contreras's workshop in 1866 during her tour around Andalusia and commented:

This gentleman makes exquisite models of different parts of the building, done to a scale, which are the most perfect miniature facsimiles possible of the different portions of this beautiful palace. Our travelers purchased several and only regretted they had not chosen some of the same size, as they would make a charming panel for a cabinet or screen.⁴²

Figure 6

Enrique Linares, *Architectural model depicting the Hall of Ambassadors at the Alcazar in Seville*. Made in plaster, alabaster and wood, 90.8 × 85 cm, ca. 1900. Private collection, London. Photograph by Gonzalo Salcedo.



Another visitor, H. Pemberton, author of *A Winter Tour in Spain* (1868), detailed important information about the models that helps us to understand their popularity and importance at the time:

Mr. Contreras has a studio that is worth visiting. He has exact copies in miniature of several parts of the building, some are painted. These vary in size between 8 and 20 inches and the prices go from \$10 to \$40. We brought one or two back to England, we thought they will look good inserted in the wall.⁴³

Once back in their country of origin, the collectors may have installed the models in the smoking rooms that were popular in Britain at the time.⁴⁴ Thanks to Owen Jones's *Plans, Elevations, Sections and Details of the Alhambra*, published in parts between 1842 and 1845, and especially after the great success of his Alhambra Court at the new Crystal Palace in Sydenham (1854), houses of the British upper classes began to include "Moorish" rooms, used primarily by men as smoking rooms and similar. These structures adopted Jones's theory of color and design, and most of them resembled the Alhambra, recreating the Alhambra experience in a form acceptable to the tastes of the British aristocracy. The Alhambra style spread around the world, but was especially important in Britain, with celebrated examples being the music room at Grove House in Hampton

Figure 7

Rafael Rus Acosta, *Architectural model inspired by the Partal oratory, Alhambra*. 45 × 35 cm, ca. 1900. Private collection, London. Photograph by Gonzalo Salcedo.



(Surrey) built between 1892 and 1896 and later in the smoking room at Rhinefield House in Hampshire, built between 1889 and 1890.⁴⁵

British collectors also brought back many models that ended up in various museums when these objects became unfashionable at the end of the nineteenth century and beginning of the twentieth century. For example, three models at the Victoria and Albert Museum in London were donated by different owners who had bought them on their trips to Granada. The Museum houses a model of one of the windows in the Hall of Comares, probably made by Contreras (inventory number V&A Repro. 1890–52) and donated by the Countess von Bothmer in 1890. There is also a magnificent three-dimensional model of the interior of the Infant's Tower (inventory number A26–1936) by another well-known model maker from Granada, Enrique Linares, donated by Captain A.W. Shean in 1936.⁴⁶ Finally, a model representing the eastern pavilion of the Court of the Lions in the

Figure 8

Diego Fernández Castro, *Architectural model depicting the Mirador de Lindaraja in the Court of the Lions, Alhambra*. ca. 1900. Private collection, London. Photograph by Gonzalo Salcedo.



Alhambra (inventory number V&A 927–1900) was donated by Mr Henry Vaughan in 1900. This last model, attributable to Contreras's workshop, demonstrates very clearly how these objects spread his vision of the Alhambra for it shows the pavilion after the restoration he carried out in the 1860s, with the new and more Orientalist dome⁴⁷ (Figure 9).

There are also five models at the Horniman Museum in London, which were probably purchased by Frederick John Horniman (1835–1906) on his trip to Spain in 1884,⁴⁸ four of them by Contreras (museum numbers 4434a, 4434b, 4435a and 11310) and one by Diego Fernandez Castro (museum number 4435b).⁴⁹

Elsewhere in Britain, models are also held in the collections of various National Trust properties, collected by their owners on their travels, or

in other circumstances, which are now difficult to reconstruct without surviving documentation. These include three models purchased by Charles Wade Paget (1883–1956), a British architect who probably bought them at Contreras's workshop (inventory numbers NT1336277, NT1336273 and NT1336278). Two are currently shown at his house in Gloucestershire, Snowhill Manor, in the Seraphine room which is dedicated to Oriental art. Five models were also acquired by Lord Curzon (1859–1925), and are now on display at his home, Kedleston Hall, in Derbyshire (inventory numbers 1078833, 107884, 107886, 107887 and 107885). Lord Curzon was a British foreign minister, who traveled to Spain in 1884 and probably bought his models directly from Contreras's workshop.⁵⁰

In addition to these key examples of private collectors, museums and art schools also acquired these architectural models in order to teach the Alhambra's designs. In 1865, Rafael Contreras gave twenty-six reduced scale models of the Alhambra to the South Kensington Museum (today

Figure 9

Attributable to Rafael Contreras,
*Architectural model depicting the
eastern pavilion at the Court of the
Lions, Alhambra.* 87 × 48 × 42 cm.
© Victoria and Albert Museum,
London, museum number 927–1900,
1860–1900.



the Victoria and Albert Museum).⁵¹ Collecting art reproductions was very important for the South Kensington Museum due to its status as an educational and teaching center, which led it to develop an important collection of plaster casts and architectural models.⁵² These models enabled students and the general public to experience the Alhambra without traveling there. This collection of twenty-six models represented façades, windows, and doors of the Alhambra; they were presented both with and without color, and thus showed the Alhambra colored as it might have been in the Nasrid period and uncolored as it was in the nineteenth century. The application of the colour was, of course, the personal and unscientific interpretation of Rafael Contreras, which meant that students learnt about a fictional Alhambra, very different to the original building.

The twenty-six models traveled as part of the South Kensington Museum's Circulation Department to different design schools and institutions around the United Kingdom. As we are able to reconstruct from the Circulation Department's boards of survey, these included Ripon Training College, Harrow County School, Kenton Lodge College in Newcastle, and Sydenham High School.⁵³ Unfortunately only one of these models remains in the museum today (inventory number 459–1865), because the others were destroyed in 1954 when they were considered “not suitable for exhibition.”⁵⁴ By the time of this disposal, the Victoria and Albert Museum had changed its collecting policy and decided to highlight original works of art rather than reproductions.

The creations of Rafael Contreras and his workshop offer an interesting example of the impact of the nineteenth-century interest in Spain's Islamic past on Spanish artists at the time. His work as a restorer was influenced by a desire to restore the Nasrid building to its “former state” and thus to display the “crown jewel” of Spanish art to European visitors, identifying the Alhambra as Spain's most famous building and the symbol of its national identity. At the same time, through his clever development of a private industry based on plaster casts and Alhambra models, he succeeded in spreading a new and more Orientalist image of the Alhambra. Given the interest in the Alhambra, these models represented perfect tourist souvenirs. They are also evidence of the changes made to the Alhambra as a result of Contreras' restorations.

These models were widely collected—especially at the end of the nineteenth century—by the Alhambra's visitors, becoming one of the vehicles for the diffusion of the style and taste of the Alhambra throughout Europe, albeit a fictional Alhambra, rebuilt to represent the glory of Spain.

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Notes

1. On this subject see: Michael Darby, *The Islamic Perspective: An Aspect of British Architecture and Design in the 19th Century*, exhibition catalog (London: Leighton House Gallery, World Of Islamic Festival Trust Publication, 1983); Claudia Heide, "The Alhambra in Britain. Between Foreignization and Domestication," *Art In Translation* 2, no. 2 (2010): 201–22; John Sweetman, *The Oriental Obsession. Islamic Inspiration in British and American Art and Architecture 1500–1920* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991); and Ignacio Henar Cuéllar et al., *La imagen romántica del legado Andalusi* (Granada: El Legado Andalusi, 1995).
2. On this subject see: Manuel Bernal Rodríguez, *La Andalucía de los libros de viajes* (Seville: Editoriales Andaluzas Unidas S.A., 1985); Blanca Krauel Heredia, *Los viajeros románticos en Andalucía. De Christopher Hervey a Richard Ford (1760–1845)* (Málaga: Universidad de Málaga, 1986); Nicholas Tromans (ed.), *The Lure of the East: Orientalist Painting* (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 2008); Cristina Viñes Millet, *Granada en los Libros de Viaje* (Granada: M. Sánchez Editorial, 1982); and Ian Robertson, *Los Curiosos impertinentes. Viajeros ingleses por España 1760–1855* (Madrid: Editorial Nacional, 1975).
3. Washington Irving, *The Alhambra: A Series of Tales and Sketches of the Moors and Spaniards* (London: Colburn and Bentley; Philadelphia: Carey & Lea, 1832); and Richard Ford, *A Handbook for Travellers in Spain and Readers at Home* (London: John Murray, 1845).
4. Heide, "The Alhambra in Britain," 210–213.
5. Girault de Prangey, *Souvenirs de Grenade et de l'Alhambra: monuments arabes et moresques de Cordoue, Séville et Grenade, dessinés et mesurés en 1832 et 1833* (Paris: Veith et Hauser, 1837); and Owen Jones and Jules Goury, *Plans, Elevations, Sections and Details of the Alhambra, from Drawings Taken on the Spot in 1834 by the Late M. Jules Goury and in 1834 and 1837 by Owen Jones, Archt. With a Complete Translation of the Arabic Inscriptions, and an Historical Notice of the Kings of Granada, from the Conquest of*

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6. Kathryn Ferry, "Printing the Alhambra: Owen Jones and Chromolithography," *Architectural History* 46 (2003): 175–88.
 7. Kathryn Ferry, "Owen Jones and the Alhambra Court at the Crystal Palace," in Glaire Anderson and Mariam Rosser-Owen (eds.), *Revisiting al-Andalus: Perspectives on the Material Culture of Islamic Iberia and Beyond* (Boston: Brill, 2007), 227–45.
 8. Juan Calatrava et al., *Owen Jones y la Alhambra* (Granada: Patronato de la Alhambra y el Generalife, 2011).
 9. Antonio Almagro Gorbea, "Las Antigüedades árabes en la Real Academia de San Fernando," in *El Legado de al-Andalus. Las antigüedades árabes en los dibujos de la Academia* (Seville: Real Academia de Bellas Artes de San Fernando, Fundación MAPFRE, 2015), 15.
 10. José de Hermosilla et al., *Antigüedades Árabes de España* (Madrid: Real Academia de Bellas Artes de San Fernando, 1787–1804).
 11. Almagro Gorbea, "Las Antigüedades árabes," 14.
 12. Horace Sebastiani, General of the French army, marched into Granada in 1808. He installed part of his army in the Alhambra, and some of its towers were transformed into prisons for the Bonaparte regime's enemies. See Juan Gay Armenteros. *Granada Contemporánea. Breve historia* (Granada: Editorial Comares, 2001), 31.
 13. Juan Manuel Barrios Rozúa, *Alhambra romántica. Los comienzos de la restauración arquitectónica en España* (Granada: Editorial Universidad de Granada, 2016), 19–23.
 14. Juan Manuel Barrios Rozúa, "La Alhambra de Granada y los difíciles comienzos de la restauración arquitectónica (1814–1840)," *Academia: Boletín de la Academia de Bellas Artes de San Fernando* 106–7 (2008): 132.
 15. Lord Andrew Thomas Blayney, *Narrative of a Forced Journey through Spain and France, as a Prisoner of War, in the Years 1810 to 1814* (London: E. Kerby, 1814), 63–64.
 16. Juan Manuel Barrios Rozúa, *Granada Napoleónica. Ciudad, arquitectura y patrimonio* (Granada: Editorial Universidad de Granada, 2016), 258.
 17. Ford, *Handbook*, 367–416.
 18. A good example of the use of this style with nationalist motivations was the construction of the Spanish pavilions at the universal exhibitions in "Moorish" style that had become identifiable as "Spanish," or the use of "Moorish" style objects to represent Spanish arts and industry in these exhibitions. See Anna McSweeney "Mudéjar and the Alhambresque: Spanish Pavilions at the Universal Expositions and the Invention of a National Style" in this volume. See also: Luis Sazatoril Ruiz, "Andalucismo y arquitectura en las

- Exposiciones Universales 1867–1900,” in Blanca Krauel Heredia et al., *Andalucía: Una imagen en Europa (1830–1929)* (Granada: Fundación Centro de Estudios Andaluces, 2008), 126–42; José Manuel Rodríguez Domingo, “La Alhambra efímera; el pabellón de España en la Exposición Universal de Bruselas 1910,” *Cuadernos de Arte* 28 (1997): 125–39; and José Manuel Rodríguez Domingo, “La Alhambra de Hierro; tradición formal y renovación técnica en la cultura arquitectónica del medievalismo islámico,” in José Manuel Rodríguez Domingo et al., *Actas del Segundo Congreso Nacional de Historia de la Construcción*, (A Coruña: Instituto Juan de Herrera, 1998), 431–41.
19. M^a Rosario Chávez González, *El Alcázar de Sevilla en el siglo XIX* (Sevilla: Patronato del Real Alcázar de Sevilla, 2004), 133–41.
 20. Mariam Rosser-Owen, *Islamic Arts from Spain* (London: V&A Publishing, 2010), 142, museum number 18–1865.
 21. On this subject see: José Álvarez Lopera, *La Alhambra entre la conservación y la restauración (1905–1915)* (Granada: Departamento de Historia del Arte de la Universidad de Granada, 1977); and Ramón Rubio Domene, *Yeserías de la Alhambra, historia, técnica y conservación* (Granada: Patronato de la Alhambra y Generalife, 2010).
 22. Rubio Domene, *Yeserías de la Alhambra*, 34–5.
 23. Archivo General de Palacio (AGP) C. 12011/32. This is the Archive from the Royal Palace in Madrid.
 24. *Le Journal des Artistes*, Paris (June 21, 1840): 399.
 25. *Ibid.*, 400.
 26. Jeannine Baticle and Cristina Marinas, *La Galerie Espagnole de Louis Philippe au Louvre, 1838–1848* (Paris: Ministère de la culture, Editions de la Réunion des musées nationaux, 1981). Claire Déléry and Ramón Rubio Domene are undertaking research on this subject, which I hope will further help us to understand the visit of these two French artists.
 27. AGP box 12011/32.
 28. Rubio Domene, *Yeserías de la Alhambra*, 116.
 29. This term is related to the person who decorates interiors. Queen Isabella II first used it in 1847 to designate Rafael Contreras’s job title.
 30. AGP Personal Archive, box 16808, case file 2.
 31. Nieves Panadero Peropadre, “Recuerdos de la Alhambra: Rafael Contreras y el Gabinete Árabe del Palacio de Aranjuez,” *Revista Reales Sitios* 122 (1994): 33–4.
 32. On Jones and his theory of colour see: Jones and Goury, *Plans, Elevations, Sections and Details*, 164; Ferry, “Printing the Alhambra,” 175–88; Ferry, “Owen Jones and the Alhambra Court,” 227–45; and Juan Calatrava y José Tito, *El Patio de la Alhambra en*

- el Crystal Palace* (Granada: Patronato de la Alhambra y Generalife, 2010), 7–103.
33. Rafael Contreras, *Estudio descriptivo de los monumentos árabes de Granada, Sevilla y Córdoba, ó sea, la Alhambra, el Alcázar y la Gran Mezquita de Occidente* (Madrid: Imprenta y litografía de A. Rodero, 1885), 282.
 34. Archivo General de la Academia registration books, 1837–40. This refers to Rafael Contreras's education.
 35. Rafael Contreras, “Las restauraciones de la Alhambra,” *El Liceo de Granada* 12 (1870): 177.
 36. Javier Piñar Samos, “Turismo emergente y mercado fotográfico en torno a la Alhambra (1842–1915),” in Javier Piñar Samos et al., *En la Alhambra. Turismo y fotografía en torno a un monumento* (Granada: Caja Granada, 2006), 13–49.
 37. On this subject see: Nieves Panadero Peropadre, “Recuerdos de la Alhambra,” 33–40; José Manuel Rodríguez Domingo, “*La arquitectura neoráabe en España: El medievalismo islámico en la cultura arquitectónica española (1840–1930)*,” Unpublished Ph.D. thesis (Granada: Universidad de Granada, 1997); Francisco Serrano Espinosa, “*Arquitectura y restauración arquitectónica en la Granada del siglo XIX: la familia Contreras*,” Unpublished Ph.D. thesis (Granada: Universidad de Granada, 2014).
 38. AGP Personal Archive, box 16808, case file 2.
 39. Many models have been analyzed, and I realized that they were formed by many individual pieces. Patronato de la Alhambra y Generalife also possess in their collection many miniatures carved on plaster, where the lines of pencil for the preparation drawings are still visible. See Figure 4.
 40. Rafael Contreras was appointed head restorer of the Alhambra in 1860, and prior to this he was “*restaurador adornista*” (restorer of ornaments).
 41. Juan Calatrava, “Owen Jones: Diseño Islámico y arquitectura moderna,” in Calatrava et al., *Owen Jones y la Alhambra*, 18.
 42. Mary Elizabeth Herbert, *Impressions of Spain* (London: Richard Bentley, 1867), 67.
 43. H. Pemberton, *A Winter Tour in Spain. By the author of “Dacia Singleton” etc.* (London: Tinsley Brothers, 1868), 222.
 44. On this subject see: Rosser-Owen, *Islamic Arts from Spain*, 108–46; Sweetman, *The Oriental Obsession*, 160–211; and Mark Crinson, *Empire Building: Orientalism and Victorian Architecture* (New York: Routledge, 1996), 15–37.
 45. Rosser-Owen, *Islamic Arts from Spain*, 129.
 46. Shean acquired this model during his trip to Granada in 1896. MA/1/S1387 Acquisition documents.
 47. Rosser-Owen, *Islamic Arts from Spain*, 118; and MA/1/V127.
 48. Archivo histórico de la Alhambra, Signatures book, no. 4 (1884).

49. Three of these models by Contreras are still on display today. With thanks to Fiona Kerlogue, Deputy Keeper of Anthropology at the Horniman Museum, for her assistance on this matter.
50. With thanks to Simon McCormack at Kedleston Hall for his assistance on this matter.
51. Juan Facundo Riaño, *Classified and Descriptive Catalogue of the Art Objects of Spanish Production in the South Kensington Museum* (London: G.E. Eyre and W. Spottiswoode, 1872), 10; and “Inventory of Objects Acquired in the Year 1865,” in *Inventory* (London: Victoria and Albert Museum, 1868), 1–4.
52. On this subject see: Fiona Leslie, “Inside Outside: Changing Attitudes towards Architectural Models in the Museums at South Kensington,” *Architectural History* 47 (2004), 159–200; Tonia Raquejo, “La Alhambra en el Museo Victoria y Albert: un catálogo de las piezas de la Alhambra y algunas obras neonazaries,” *Cuadernos de Arte e Iconografía* 1, no. 1 (1988), 201–44.
53. The Circulation Department was created as part of the Museum’s aim to make art as accessible as possible. The Circulation Department would create small collections that would travel around the Britain, exhibiting objects from the South Kensington Museum. Victoria and Albert Museum, Circulation Department loans out (1912–54).
54. Victoria and Albert Museum, Circulation Department, Boards of Survey, part 2, (1954). The South Kensington Museum changed its name to the Victoria and Albert Museum in 1899.