



Victor Deupi
Jean-François Lejeune

Cuban Modernism

Mid-Century Architecture 1940–1970

With photography by Silvia Ros

Birkhäuser
Basel

Victor Deupi

To my parents,

Carlos Deupi and Teresita Santaballa Vignale

Jean-François Lejeune

To Astrid Rotemberg,

and in memory of Roberto Segre

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PREFACE

Within the last thirty years, Roberto Segre, Eduardo Luis Rodríguez, Carlos Sambricio, and Francisco Gómez Díaz roused the study of mid-twentieth-century Cuban architecture in their many influential books and essays. Their vigorous publication efforts shed new light on countless masters and masterpieces, long forgotten after the revolution of 1959, and those produced since then. Inspired by the great figures of Joaquín Weiss, Luis Bay Sevilla, Pedro Martínez Inclán, Emilio Roig de Leuchsenring, and others who had previously written about the topic in the middle decades of the twentieth century, their publications introduced the buildings of modern Cuba to a broader academic and specialist audience. However, much work remains to be done as very little of this material is available in English. It is critical that non-native scholars engage with Cuban architecture, thus injecting the tremendous wealth of extant source material with new points of departure, varied interpretations, and diverse agendas. Equally important, historians need to reach beyond the confines of Cuba, situating Cuban architecture in a broader context by examining its interaction with other centers of modern culture such as the wider Caribbean, Latin America, North America, and Europe. Lesser-known architects, women, and minorities need to be seen and heard. These considerations form the basis of *Cuban Modernism: Mid-Century Architecture 1940–1970*, in which the authors have attempted to approach pivotal moments in the building culture of the mid-twentieth century through an examination of Cuban architecture at home and abroad.

Despite the publication efforts of those authors mentioned above, the scholarly research on Cuban twentieth-century architecture remains incomplete. There are admittedly many tourist guides, photo albums, and coffee-table books with beautifully illustrated images of Cuban architecture of the twentieth century, but proper scientific research with full annotations and comprehensive bibliographies remains regrettably incomplete. Sigfried Giedion's landmark book *A Decade of New Architecture* (1951), and Henry-Russell Hitchcock's *Latin American Architecture since 1945* (1955), both brought to light the modern architecture of Latin America including several works from Cuba. Hitchcock's pivotal publication was also associated with a major exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) in New York in 1956. In Brussels, Jean-François Lejeune curated the exhibition *Cruauté et utopie: villes et paysages d'Amérique latine* (Cruelty and Utopia: Cities and Landscapes of Latin America),

which for the first time attempted to track the origins and specific representations of modernity in a parallel survey of Mexico, Brazil, Argentina, and Cuba. Barry Bergdoll, Carlos Eduardo Comas, Jorge Francisco Liernur, and Patricio del Real followed up on that momentous effort with their *Latin America in Construction: Architecture, 1955–1980* also at MoMA in 2015, in which Cuba received even greater consideration. Individual efforts such as John Loomis's *Revolution of Forms: Cuba's Forgotten Art Schools* (2011), Timothy Hyde's *Constitutional Modernism Architecture and Civil Society in Cuba, 1933–1959* (2013), Allan Shulman's *Building Bacardi: Architecture, Art & Identity* (2016), and Joseph Hartman's *Dictator's Dreamscape: How Architecture and Vision Built Machado's Cuba and Invented Modern Havana* (2019) provided insightful scholarly research into specific moments in twentieth-century Cuban architectural culture, but to date no work surveys the period in a comprehensive manner.

There is also a new book in preparation by the Italian cultural historian, Alessandra Anselmi, titled *L'Avana déco: arte, cultura, società* that will consider the art and architecture of the early half of the twentieth century in Havana in an equally comprehensive manner.

In 2016, the authors curated an exhibition at the Coral Gables Museum in South Florida titled *Cuban Architects at Home and in Exile: The Modernist Generation* that served as the foundation stone for the much larger project which is this book. The three-month long exhibition was followed by a series of remarkable and generous donations of architectural collections by individuals and families associated with the exhibition to the University of Miami's Cuban Heritage Collection at the Richter Library, creating what is the most significant archive of Cuban architecture outside of the island. Additionally, a lengthy chapter titled "Cuban Architects at Home and in Exile: The Modernist Generation" in the recently published collection of essays *Picturing Cuba: Art, Culture, and Identity on the Island and in the Diaspora* (2019), edited by Jorge Duany of the Cuban Research Institute at Florida International University, served as the *de facto* account of the exhibition. It is therefore our sincere hope that our new book, *Cuban Modernism*, will complete the project to date and inspire future generations of architects and historians to build on the literature that exists and make the study of mid-century Cuban architecture something that everyone considers relevant to the study of twentieth-century modern architecture.

* * *

We would like to recognize and thank the following institutions and individuals who have made this effort possible. The list is far too great to mention here in full and we regret that we cannot recognize everyone who has contributed to this effort, but we are confident that this project is open ended and that future investigations will allow everyone involved to have a voice.

To produce the book, we would like to thank María Gabriela Dines and Alfredo Rivera for their research and contributions to certain critical sections of the manuscript. Without Silvia Ros's superb photographs, the book would not be complete. More importantly, her brilliant work, supported by Anne Swanson, brings to light the terribly important need for further cultural preservation on the island. The same can be said of Eduardo Latour who contributed to the original exhibition which kick-started the process. Several research assistants deserve mention, namely Astrid Rotemberg, Taimaisú Ferrer Sin, Yiqing Wang, Antoine Laduron, and Valentin Secq. Ria Stein and her team at Birkhäuser gave us the chance to fulfill this project. Sean McCaughan provided much needed copy editing, for which we are extremely grateful.

Several institutions contributed to the project and deserve recognition. First of all, the Graham Foundation for Advanced Studies in the Fine Arts provided a generous institutional grant that enabled the project to be realized. The University of Miami School of Architecture, and Dean Rodolphe el-Khoury, encouraged and supported both the exhibition and the present book. Several faculty members including José Gelabert-Navia, Allan Shulman, and Rafael Fornés provided precious help. Dean Charles Eckman of the University of Miami Libraries, and Elizabeth Cerejido, and her team at the Cuban Heritage Collection provided us with invaluable access to their extraordinary collections. Ingrid Nitchman of the interlibrary loan department made possible what seemed improbable. Gilda Santana and her team at the Architecture Research Center made the day-to-

day research and writing possible. Ramón and Nercys Cernuda graciously opened their gallery and archives to us without reservations, as did Juan Bergaz of the Bacardi Corporation. Jorge Duany of the Florida International University Cuban Research Institute, Rene Ramos of the Miami Dade College Archives, William Whittaker and Allison Rose Olsen of the Architectural Archives of the University of Pennsylvania School of Design, all deserve special thanks. Other local institutions include the Coral Gables Museum, HistoryMiami Museum, and the Wolfsonian-FIU. Several academics and independent scholars deserve mention as well for their thoughtful suggestions and comments. These include Rosa Lowinger, Alessandra Anselmi, Abigail McEwan, Emilio Cueto, Carlos Sambricio, Enrique Larrañaga, Robert Hill, Rafael DiazCasas, Hermes Mallea, and Belmont Freeman. We would like to especially thank Barry Bergdoll and Patricio del Real of MoMA for helping us at critical junctures in the process.

There were many Cuban architects and their families who contributed to the project from the beginning and we are extremely grateful for their support. These include Hilario Candelá, Raúl Álvarez, David Cabarrocas, Teresita Vignale, Carlos Deupi, Angel Saqui, Orestes del Castillo, Cristina Vidal Artaud, Diana Artaud, Humberto Alonso Jr., Maria Alonso, Carmen Alonso, Bob and Ed Chisholm, Adam Frisius, Jorge Mantilla, Matilde and Carlos Batista, Sara and Manuel Gutiérrez, Lin Arroyo, Max Borges Recio, Emilio and Otilia Fernández, Fernando Capablanca, Terry Dezmelyk, Myrtha Merlo Vega, Mariana Ravenet and Carlos Padiá Jr., Carlos Ramírez-Corría, William H. Griffin, Francisco Jayo, Alicia McHugh and María E. Crosby, Marilys R. Nepomechie, Maria Elena Zas, Elena de Tapia-Ruano, Hervin Romney, Raul L. Rodríguez, Juan Luis Morales, Margarita and Pablo Cano, Celso González-Falla, and Domitila Fox.

Finally, the authors would like to thank their respective spouses, Jill Deupi and Astrid Rotemberg, for their enduring support, trust, and faith in our work.





INTRODUCTION

Modernity and *Cubanidad*

The architecture of the period reflects a process of continuous transition, always with a high quality of production, in the hands of a vanguard that managed to interweave the diverse influences that carried the codes of the evolving modernity—including the Latin American ones—with a series of vernacular components. The latter had to do with tradition—structure, typology, atmosphere—, with the tropical climate—screening from sun and light, thermal stability and bonanza—, with the fluidity of interior and exterior spaces, and with contemporary languages adapted to the place as proposed by Team X. In doing so, they aimed at building a city that could be configured as the Antillean metropolis par excellence.

Francisco Gómez Díaz

◀◀ Nicolás Quintana. Children's play area at the Residential Yacht Club (*Cabañas del Sol*), Varadero (1955).

◀◀ Emilio Sanchez. *Colonia Jagüey*, watercolor on paper (1954).

Pioneering Influences

In the late 1920s, Cuban periodicals such as *El Arquitecto* and *Arquitectura* started debating and publishing the works of modern architects.¹ Discussions on the relative merits of tradition and modernity typically included the championing of the great monuments of history in contrast to provocative quotes from the early pioneers of the modern movement. *El Arquitecto* generally favored conservative positions, whereas *Arquitectura*, published by the Colegio Nacional de Arquitectos de Cuba (National Institute of Cuban Architects), opened its columns to articles and projects discussing works by Bruno Taut, Adolf Loos, Frank Lloyd Wright, Le Corbusier, Walter Gropius, and others.² The regional expression of modernity—how to be modern and Cuban at the same time—also emerged in Cuban architectural circles during this time, and it was increasingly tested by issues of national identity, in particular Spanish and American influences, but also African roots. Simultaneously, European modernism began to influence Cuban architects in a more direct manner. Figures such as Richard Neutra, Walter Gropius, and José Luis Sert among others began to visit the island, lecture to students at the University of Havana School of Architecture, and take on projects in collaboration with local Cuban architects.

The September 1937 edition of *Arquitectura* included excerpts from Walter Gropius's pivotal essay, "Arquitectura funcional" (Functional architecture), from the November 1930 lectures he delivered in Spanish in Bilbao and San Sebastián, Spain.³ He argued that the demands of modern life necessitated an approach that was removed from the specific or regional contingencies of society. For Gropius, the stylistic formalism of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century had given way to a new investigation of function, what he considered the essence of architectural form. However, he suggested that climate and proportion also contributed significantly to the architect's interpretation of form, and these were not simply functional criteria.

In Cuba, students of architecture were increasingly impatient to see the profession open to modernism and, in 1944, the infamous *Quema de los Vignolas*—the burning of copies of Vignola's treatise on the orders in classical architecture—took place on the patio of the University of Havana School of Architecture. As Nicolás Quintana commented later, the reason for this symbolic act was the quest for "the freedom of design ... we wanted to start a search that did not include the classical orders."⁴ The new generation was particularly enamored with Gropius, who eventually visited the island in early April 1949 as a guest of the University of Havana School of Architecture, and gave a public lecture to students and professionals at the headquarters of the College of Architects in the Vedado.⁵ His visit and lecture were well-documented in the April edition of *Arquitectura*, with various essays, photographs, and a cheeky caricature image of him by the Cuban artist Heriberto Portela.

Long before Gropius's memorable visit, Josef Albers had visited Cuba in 1934 at the invitation of the designer Clara Porset, who at the time was the head of the Escuela Técnica Industrial (Technical Industrial School) for women in Rancho Boyeros, and an early advocate of contemporary design adapting to tropical climates.⁶ Albers delivered a series of three public lectures at the Lyceum and Lawn Tennis Club, the premier women's cultural institution in the city, as well as exhibiting his work there. Porset met Albers at the suggestion of Gropius, who encouraged her to study with him at the newly founded Black Mountain College in North Carolina, where he had settled after leaving the Bauhaus in 1933.⁷ Porset spent a summer with Josef and Anni Albers, developing a friendship that would last for many years. Albers would return to Cuba again in 1952, this time at the invitation of the School of Architecture to lecture to students and faculty.⁸

Nathaniel Cortlandt Curtis, Sr., a North American architect, preservationist, and the first dean of the Tulane School of Architecture, also lectured at the University of Havana in 1938.⁹ His presentation on the evolution of modern architecture from Henry Hobson Richardson to the present singled out Gropius, Le Corbusier, and J.J.P. Oud as the leaders of the movement and the ones whose work had most dramatically altered the landscape of contemporary design, even though he was critical of Le Corbusier's buildings on pilotis (known in Cuba as *palafitos*).¹⁰ Oud and Le Corbusier had never visited Cuba, but the latter's writings were regularly translated in *Arquitectura* and *Arquitectura y artes decorativas* during this time, literally bringing to Cuban architects his ideas on the city, geometry, and the potential of residential design in achieving the *espíritu nuevo* (new spirit) in architecture.¹¹

Another influential foreign architect to visit the island was the Austrian-American modernist Richard Neutra, who first came to Havana in 1945.¹² He lectured on *La arquitectura y el mundo de hoy* (Architecture and the world of today), again at the University of Havana School of Architecture, with his former pupil, Cuban architect Rafael de Cárdenas Culmell, translating his talk into Spanish. In a review of Neutra's lecture, the renowned Cuban writer, attorney, and art critic, Jorge Mañach, noted that within the last fifteen years, Cuba had established a new generation of young architects that included Eugenio Batista, Emilio de Soto, Rafael de Cárdenas, Emilio del Junco, Nicolás Arroyo, Lilliam Mederos, and Gabriela Menéndez, among others. As co-founder in 1927 of the *Revista de Avance*, a journal that brought to light a number of modern Cuban artists and the new tendencies in Cuban art, Mañach did actively follow the emergence of modern architecture on the island.¹³ By the late 1920s, modern art in Cuba had become much more political, reflecting opposition to the dictatorial regime of Gerardo Machado and the American neo-colonial presence on the island.¹⁴ Inspired by the Mexican mural movement, many Cuban vanguard painters sought to push for more socially conscious public art. Reflecting this trend, in 1938 the School of Architecture at the University of Havana held a major group exhibition of Mexican painters that included David Alfaro Siqueiros, José Clemente Orozco, Diego Rivera, and others.¹⁵ Like their Mexican counterparts, Cuban artists were seeking a genuine mode of expression that responded to the immediate social issues in Cuba, to the complex workings of mainstream culture, popular discourse, and vernacular origins. Similarly, Mañach argued that the young Cuban architects were giving Cuba a new creative, imaginative, and elegant architecture that was suited to the natural climate and levity of the island.¹⁶ But then Mañach noted a problem with this new generation, asking whether such an architecture would be suited to the Plaza de la Catedral in Old Havana. His response was certainly negative, suggesting that a stylized colonialism that maintained the formal coherence and spiritual unity of the place was preferable to the extreme functionalism of the new architecture. In other words, Mañach believed that the genuine legacy of colonial Cuban architecture was something to be preserved and respected, and this too was a tendency that would greatly influence the emerging young architects on the island.

Extolling the Vernacular

From the early 1920s, the rediscovery of the Spanish countryside was a geographical, cultural, and professional endeavor that spurred a radical revision of Spanish identity through the

study of vernacular architecture and its urban expression in the *pueblos* (villages), from Castile to Andalusia to Ibiza. Architects and theorists like Fernando García Mercadal in Madrid and José Luis Sert in Barcelona advocated the development of a modern architecture that would be based upon the reinterpretation and the simplification of the vernacular. In particular, Sert and his colleagues in the *Grupo de Arquitectos y Técnicos Españoles para la Arquitectura Contemporánea* (Group of Spanish Architects and Technicians for Contemporary Architecture, or GATE-PAC) extolled the lessons of Ibiza, the island where "the 'historic styles' do not exist."¹⁷ At the same time in Italy, architects like Gio Ponti, Bernard Rudofsky, and Adalberto Libera—to name but a few—used the vernacular to define a way to be both modern and Italian. In 1936, the rationalist architect Giuseppe Pagano exhibited and published his spectacular photographs of Italian rural architecture as potential inspiration to modernity.¹⁸

In Latin America, the vernacular was primarily the colonial architecture, and above all, the private houses whose typology and construction details—the patio, the thin rooms permitting cross-ventilation, the louvers as brise-soleils, and the deep porticoes—offered both privacy and a unique response to the environmental conditions. From the first decades of the twentieth century and in each country of the Southern cone and the Caribbean, the architects of the neo-colonial movement increasingly questioned the French-influenced and dominant Beaux-Arts system at the turn of the century. Hence, the white surfaces, the reduced ornament, and the asymmetry of composition in plan and volume opened the way to the more radical vision of a modern movement that would advocate the synthesis between international modernity, tradition, and national identity.¹⁹ From his early neo-colonial works in Guadalajara to his residential masterpieces in Mexico City, Luis Barragán demonstrated the architectonic and poetic authority of "vernacular modernism."²⁰ Likewise, for Lúcio Costa in Brazil, modern architecture was "a Mediterranean expression on its way to becoming international."²¹ Modern architecture entailed a recovery of the clarity and objectivity of Greco-Roman architecture, and in particular that of the Spanish Mediterranean and its South American extension. In 1922, he dedicated a year to the study of colonial cities in the region of Minas Gerais, whose vernacular would become a major reference for his architecture.²²

In Cuba as well, the modern movement's concern with typology heavily influenced how the new architecture of the 1920s and the 1930s—however much clad in neo-colonial dress—would depart from the early twentieth-century man-

sions and public buildings, all heavily influenced by the French Beaux-Arts theory and particularly prevalent in the Vedado district and western suburbs of Havana. In particular, the re-emergence of the patio or courtyard was the most conspicuous example of the new way of thinking about the past to define a genuinely Cuban modernity. Additionally, like in all Latin American countries, the art-deco movement in Cuba endowed buildings of all types with a modern architectural image that married clarity and functionality with a tropical character. Of particular interest among the scores of well-designed and functional structures built in the 1930s and 1940s were Pedro Martínez Inclán's Justo Carrillo apartment building in the Vedado (1931), Mira and Rosich's Edificio López Serrano in the Vedado (Apartment building, 1932), de Soto's Clínica de Maternidad Obrera (Maternity clinic for workers, 1943), and Luis Dauval's Hospital Infantil Antituberculoso (Children's Anti-Tuberculosis Hospital, 1944).

The periodical *Arquitectura* began publishing essays on Cuban vernacular architecture in the latter half of the 1930s, bringing to light the historical importance, design simplicity, and modest beauty of the many rustic buildings in towns, villages, and landscapes throughout the island.²³ More specifically, the focus was on the *vueltabajera* (literally the "lower around") regions of Cuba, including the extreme far west provinces of Pinar del Río and Viñales (a fertile land known as *Vuelta Abajo*), and also Nueva Gerona (Isle of Pines), Remedios, and Oriente. These areas were littered with *caseríos* (rustic shacks), rural *bohíos* (native Taino timber dwellings with thatched roofs), and country *bodegas* (stores that sell food and other domestic provisions). Yet, despite the signature *portales* (arcades or porticoes) and thatched roofs that characterized the *casita criolla* (Creole house), these buildings typically had dirt floors, porous walls and roofs, no proper kitchens or baths, or clean water source other than open wells.²⁴ The vernacular structures throughout the island were both picturesque landmarks of the Cuban countryside, and horrific living and working structures for their unfortunate inhabitants. Here, mid-century Cuban architects were particularly concerned with the obvious contradiction.²⁵

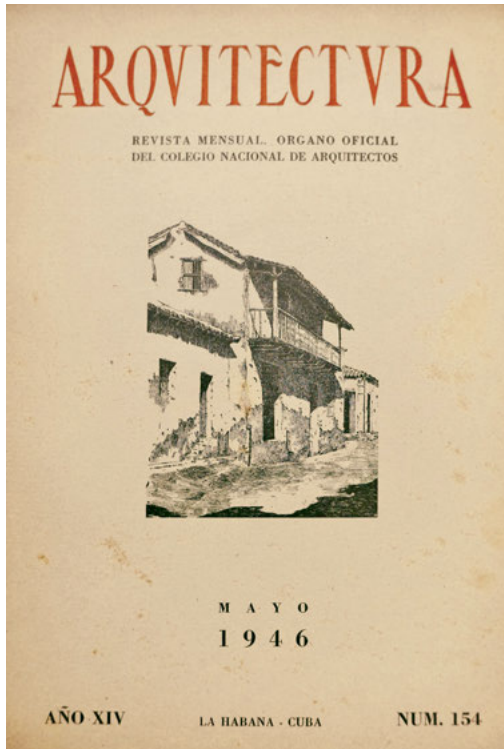
In addition to the articles on *vueltabajera* buildings, *Arquitectura* regularly featured cover illustrations of Cuba's colonial and vernacular architecture, usually drawn in graphite or pen and ink by some of the island's most respected draftsmen, including Carlos Ramírez Guerra, Alejandro Sánchez Felipe, Manuel Álvarez, and Daniel Serra-Badué.²⁶ Serra-Badué, in particular, had studied architecture at the University of Havana from 1939–1941 before he completed his artistic training at the Academia de San Alejandro, also in Havana, in 1943.²⁷ He was featured in *Arquitectura* in 1939 and again in 1941, and would

subsequently produce nearly twenty cover images for the journal between 1943 and 1947, including many views of his native city of Santiago de Cuba, and various streetscapes of Bayamo, and Camagüey.²⁸ Significantly, the patio houses and streets of the Cuban city of Trinidad appeared repeatedly among the pages of the periodical, making the city a literal "monumento de la nacionalidad" (nationality monument).²⁹

Hence, the modern concept of *cubanidad* (Cuban identity of transculturation), which was already present in literary and artistic circles, was the impetus behind the first generation of Cuban modernists' search for an architecture that could conceivably represent a national and regional idiom.³⁰ The idea was propelled by the Cuban architect and planner, Pedro Martínez Inclán, who noted in his entry address to the National Academy of Arts and Letters on January 23, 1926, that "from an architectural point of view, Havana possesses an individuality which consists in absolutely having none."³¹ Though he argued that the colonial era architecture on the island certainly had a clear identity, the subsequent arrival of other European styles, including neo-classicism, neo-Gothic romanticism, art nouveau, and Catalan Modernisme, had rendered the city paradoxically unidentifiable. His plea for the recovery of a singular architectural language that could reposition the Cuban capital as the exemplary garden city of the Ibero-American world, led to the break with the eclectic past, and the embrace of a form of neo-colonial civic and private architecture as a way of returning to Cuba's roots.

In 1938, the College of Architects instituted the annual *Premio Medalla de Oro* (Gold Medal) competition for the nation's finest new work of architecture. The inaugural competition in early 1939 came down to three finalists: Joaquín E. Weiss for his magnificent Edificio de la Biblioteca (Library) for the University of Havana, Saturnino Parajón for his Teatro Fausto (Fausto Theater) on the Paseo del Prado, and the brothers Ernesto and Eugenio Batista, for a new residence for the Falla Bonet family in Miramar. The jury, however, could not decide on a winner given the great diversity of projects and their vastly different scales.³² It was determined that the inaugural prize would be postponed until 1940 and that the award would be given in the category of residential architecture. Nevertheless, the competition brought to light an intense debate between traditionalists and modernists that would never really disappear, invariably shaping the modern architecture of Cuba along the lines of regional character.

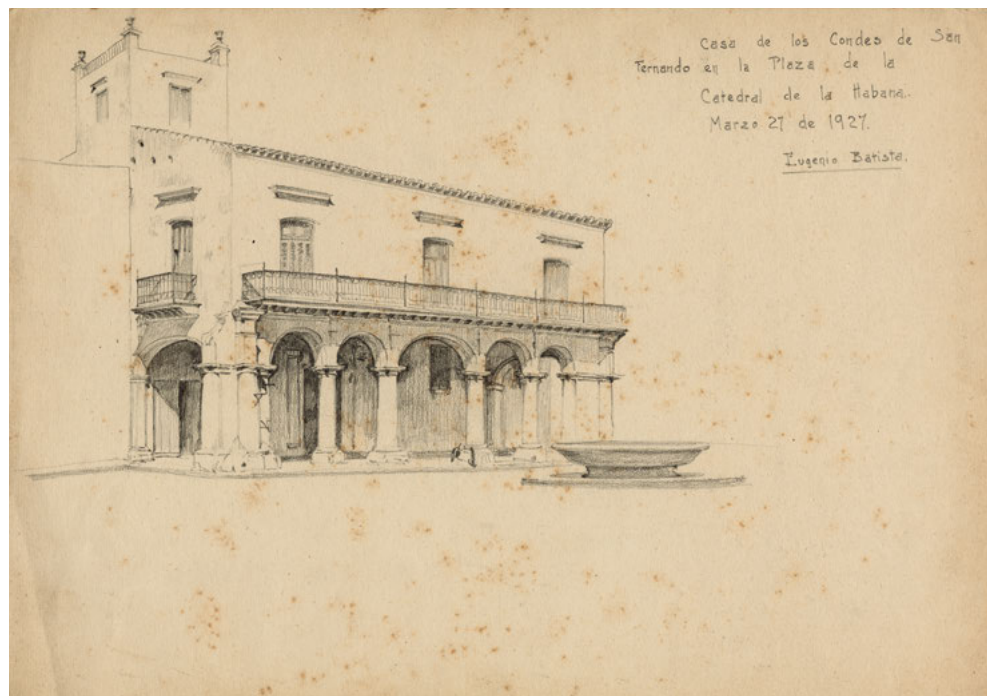
In 1941, the journal *Arquitectura* published an article by Carlos Mendoza Zeledon titled "Por una arquitectura cubana" (For A Cuban Architecture) that argued in favor of a unified



▲ Daniel Serra-Badué. *Esquina que forman las calles Carnicería y San Jerónimo, Santiago de Cuba.*

▲ Poster for the VII Congreso Panamericano de Arquitectos.

▼ Eugenio Batista. *Casa de los Condes de San Fernando en la Plaza de la Catedral de la Habana (March 27, 1927).*



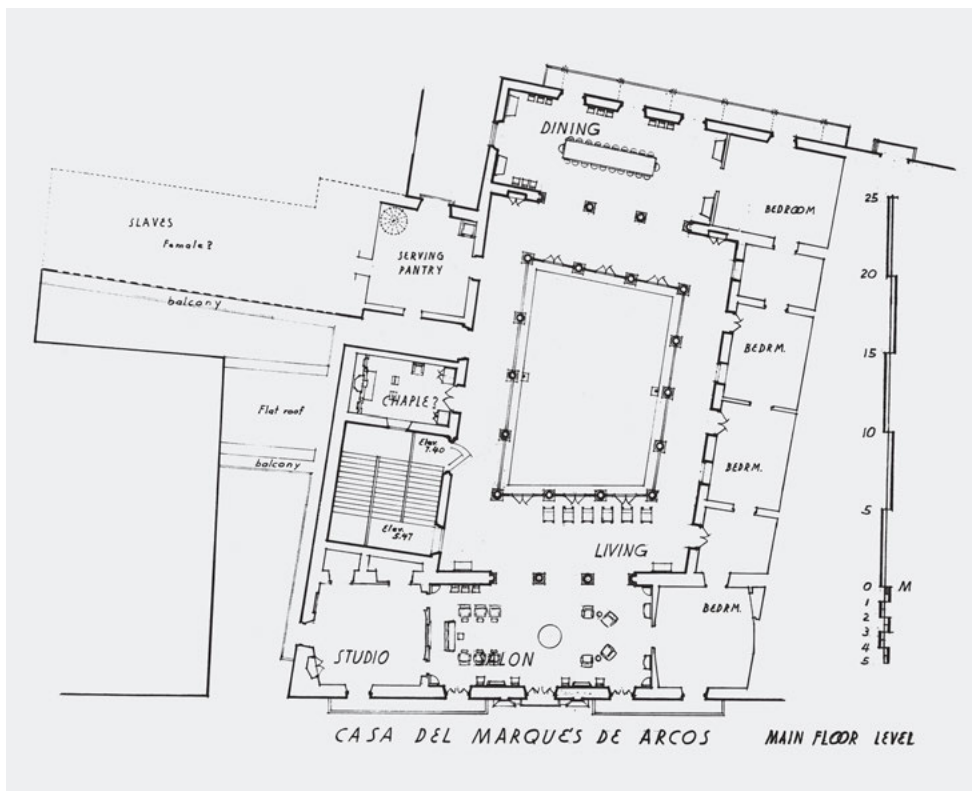
architecture that reflected the characteristics of both colonial and modern buildings, and recognized that only in exceptional cases should other “styles” of architecture be produced.³³ This would guarantee that the architecture produced in Cuba would respond to the natural contingencies of the island’s landscape, climate, materials, and ways of living. Similarly, the writings of Joaquín E. Weiss, Luis Bay Sevilla, Pedro Martínez Inclán, Emilio Roig de Leuchsenring, and others would bring to light the inherent value of Cuba’s colonial past in architecture and the importance of Havana as a modern cosmopolitan capital.³⁴

Architects like Eugenio Batista were early practitioners of architectural sketching and drawing as a way of better understanding the country’s colonial past, its buildings and urban spaces. His sketches are not only detailed inquiries into the nuanced character of colonial architecture and urbanism, but also beautiful drawings in and of themselves. In June 1949, *Arquitectura* published the winning entry for the poster announcing the *VII Congreso Panamericano de Arquitectos* (Seventh Pan-American Congress of Architects) to be held in Havana in December 1949: Emilio de Soto’s collage of the Havana cathedral, the Capitol, the art-deco tower of the Compañía Telefónica de Cuba, the new headquarters of the Colegio de Arquitectos,

and the Radiocentro Building, promoted not only the evolution of Cuban architecture but also one of its most interesting characteristics, the continuity between past and present within the city fabric.³⁵

Nuestra casa de ayer y de hoy

In April 1936, the periodical *Social* devoted a special issue to the *Casa cubana* (Cuban House), and more specifically to the principles that should, according to various authors, guide the development of the modern Cuban house. By the 1930s, residential design had become the natural testing ground for new innovative ideas on architecture and modern life throughout Europe and Latin America, but the Cuban profession and upper- and middle-class clientele lagged behind. The entrance of *Social* into the discussion of the modern house was thus critical, as the monthly magazine was primarily read by the high bourgeoisie and thus could be influential in directing clients to accept new typologies and aesthetic. In his introductory essay “Nuestra casa de ayer y de hoy,” (Our house from yesterday and today) Joaquín Weiss explicitly argued that the untarnished “rationalism” of Cuban colonial architecture deployed along centuries of use “connected it ideologically with the contempo-



◀ Eugenio Batista. Drawing of the Casa del Marqués de Aguas Claras, Plaza de la Catedral, Old Havana (1927).

▶ Photograph of Eugenio Batista with students visiting a patio in Old Havana (n.d.).



rary architectural trends.”³⁶ For the author, the large size of the rooms, the patio, the portal or colonnaded arcade, the large balconies, and the windows were the “rational” elements of colonial architecture, most of them linked to the climatic conditions and ensuing urban culture, that had disappeared during the last decades of architectural development. Most specifically, he described the colonial patio as the “real lung of the house, the oasis that provides refreshment against the scorching sun and protection against dust and street noise,” whose “artistic possibilities and, one could venture to say, ‘poetic’ ones ... gave it an inestimable spiritual value.”³⁷ He advocated the traditional and protective *portal* against the popular, yet difficult to use, open terraces, and eulogized the inventiveness of the Cuban builder in matters of windows, louvers, and other screening devices. Hence, to design and develop the modern ideal Cuban house, Weiss maintained that it was necessary to depart from the postulates linked to the physical and social milieu,

reject any preconceived distribution, style or materials, and abstract the process from technical and social experiments.³⁸ In other essays, the architects Luis de Soto and César Guerra advocated for greater experiment in new forms, materials, and ways of life, but unequivocally referred to them in relation to the invariants of Cuban colonial typologies and buildings described by Weiss.³⁹ José María Bens Arrarte discussed the challenge of the modern apartment building—too often organized around narrow and unusable courtyards—and the necessity of reinventing both the type and its relation to the natural context. He wrote that “in the future, dwellings will be built on lots of other proportions, and the courtyards will be transformed into large collective gardens inside the blocks.”⁴⁰

At the time of the publication, many Cuban architects had already initiated their search for the modern house, and, in parallel with their investigation of the colonial house and its variants, they focused on achieving the maximum comfort, and the



functional logic of a design, where air, light, hygiene, and other practical matters would reign supreme.⁴¹ They also had to rely entirely on private patronage for support as there was little speculative residential building at the time and no programs of public housing as in other Latin American countries such as Mexico and Brazil. Therefore, the private house provided the most fruitful opportunity for exploring new ideas of living, building, and working. As new houses were usually located on suburban lots, the architects adapted the colonial principles to these new conditions. They produced an architecture that could be labeled as neo-colonial and was identified by the asymmetry of the plan, the thinness of the rooms, and the presence of porticoes and patios.⁴² The resulting designs were in many ways similar to the neo-Mediterranean architecture in California and Florida, but also in Mexico or Brazil with the early houses of both Luis Barragán in Guadalajara and Lúcio Costa in Rio and the countryside.

Eventually, Eugenio Batista opened the way with the Falla Bonet house along the sea in Miramar in 1938. Built for the wealthy industrialist and philanthropist Eutimio Falla Bonet, the house was organized around a series of patios, lined with arcades and windows protected by wooden louvers. It is only in 1960 that he published his essay “La casa cubana” but Batista is known to have repeatedly advocated, particularly through his teaching, the use of the three “P”s — *persianas* (louvers), *pati-*

os (courtyards), and *portales* (porticoes or arcades) — as necessary elements of a Cuban modernism that would use tradition, history, and adaptation to climate to represent the modernizing national identity of the island. Interestingly, Clara Porset had, in 1931 already, advocated for the same tenets in her essay “La decoración interior contemporánea. Su adaptación al trópico,” published in Cuba that year.⁴³ As Batista wrote:

In making of their houses a defense against our torrid tropical sun, our ancestors found three splendid resources, a legacy that would be inconsiderate not to use today: patios (courtyards), portales (porticoes or arcades) and persianas (louvers), these being the three “P”s that constitute the “ABC”s of our tropical architecture.⁴⁴

In the published essay, Batista pointed out the limited size of windows and the continuous use of translucent glass in color, known as *vitrales* (stained glass windows), in simpler forms than the half-circles typically used during colonial times. He also acknowledged the changes produced by the automobile often occupying the front of the house, as well as the importance of new materials. Notwithstanding, he affirmed that the three “P”s should continue to model the new Cuban architecture in the material realm, while “rhythm, gaiety and cleanliness” would be needed to fulfil its “spiritual” future.⁴⁵

To be sure, Batista was embracing Joaquín Weiss's thesis and making more palatable the modern adaptation of the Cuban variants. From there onward, the Cuban architects outshone each other in virtuosity and invention in plan, section, and structure. In doing so, they produced scores of beautiful houses that were not only unabashedly modern but genuinely Cuban in their typological organization and response to social and climatic conditions. A few years later, the arrival in Cuba of the Spanish architect and planner, José Luis Sert, would most significantly widen the course of Cuban modernism by prioritizing housing and masterplanning the greater Havana.

Sert, ATEC, and the Charter of Havana

Fleeing the Spanish Civil War, José Luis Sert moved to Paris in 1937. There, in collaboration with Luis Lacasa, he built the Pavilion of the Spanish Republic at the *Exposition Internationale des Arts et Techniques dans la Vie Moderne*, at the heart of which was Picasso's large mural, *Guernica*. He lived in the

French capital until 1939 when he received an invitation from Walter Gropius to join the faculty at the Harvard University Graduate School of Design. The same year, Sert and his wife left Europe and spent a few months in Havana preparing for their immigration to the United States.⁴⁶ There he established important contacts with the new generation of architects, particularly with Eugenio Batista, and undoubtedly inspired them to actively promote modern architecture on the island.

In 1941, a group of architects, engineers, and other technicians associated with the *Congrès internationaux d'architecture moderne* (International Congress of Modern Architecture, or CIAM) formed the *Agrupación Tectónica de Expresión Contemporánea* (Tectonic Group of Contemporary Expression, or ATEC), a "nucleus of young minds, inclined to the experimentation, the investigation, and the fight" and intent to study and resolve "the architectonic and urbanistic problems in Cuba, always in the present and toward the future."⁴⁷ They embraced the principles of CIAM but quickly started to secure their own

◀ Eugenio Batista. Ricardo Cervera Falla residence, detail of façade, Miramar (1949).

▼ View of the ATEC exhibition, Trinidad, *lo que fue, es y será* (1943).

▼ Nicolás Quintana. Wall and door, Trinidad, photograph.





◀ **Arroyo and Menéndez Christmas party on the terrace of the office's studio, Miramar (early 1950s). José Luis Sert is at the back of the group, with eyeglasses.**

▶ **Nicolás Arroyo and Gabriela Menéndez. Studio workshop of the architects Arroyo and Menéndez, Miramar (ca. 1952).**

identity. In 1943, the *Patronato Pro-Urbanismo* (Pro-Urbanism Society) and the ATEC set up an innovative exhibit of colonial architecture titled *Trinidad, lo que fue, es y será* (Trinidad, what was, is, and will be) in the heart of Havana. Curated by Emilio del Junco, Eduardo Montoulieu and Miguel Gastón, the exhibition's message was manifold: it advocated that the urban and architectural qualities of Trinidad should be historically preserved, not as a "romantic" expression of Cuban culture and way of life, but rather as an example for the future. The exhibition promoted the integral recuperation of the city fabric, not as a monument but as a vital and contemporary environment:

Trinidad, in addition to its great archeological value, is a city that is alive. Harshly punished, forgotten, Trinidad did not die; and it is potentially a city that can and should revive its splendid and glorious past in the nineteenth century, with the physiognomy of the twentieth century.⁴⁸

Nicolás Arroyo and the organizers of the exhibition concluded that Trinidad, representative of the best of the colonial architecture and urbanism, could inform contemporary architecture and progressive urban design, while avoiding any temptation to a false historicism. By and large, the exhibition was a continuation, at the urban and regional scale, of Batista's thesis about the three "P"s and the invariants of Cuban architecture. In 1948, Clara Porset detailed how those elements could be best used in modern Cuban architecture, and paid homage to the ATEC group in a lecture titled "Espacio interior para vivir en Cuba. Gestación de síntesis cubana" (Interior space for living in Cuba. Gestation of a Cuban synthesis).

ATEC is the group which has given us examples of how to organize space for living in Cuba ... how to assimilate the vital elements of our architectural heritage, how to make concrete the universal principles that will fructify in giving them a Cuban expression ... It is the members of ATEC who

have embarked on the task, which is, in the last instance, a full-fledged battle against the climate ... The fight against the hurricanes, against the light and the excess of noise, and, even more so, the FIGHT AGAINST THE HEAT ... It is the eternal fight of man against nature.⁴⁹

In 1948, Martínez Inclán published the *Código de Urbanismo* (Urban Planning Code), subtitled *Carta de Atenas, Carta de La Habana* (Charter of Athens, Charter of Havana) and presented it as the Cuban version of the Charter of Athens published in French in 1943 and in English three years later.⁵⁰ The document followed closely the structure of its source but added many

concepts related to the civic importance of the city, the need for low-income housing, the neighborhood unit, and the necessity of a parks system. More significantly, Martínez Inclán inserted two new sections. The first one, titled "Legislation," outlined the administrative and political components of the systematic planning of the city and the region, thus asserting the requirements of the new constitution of 1940 and sustaining the goals of the *Patronato Pro-Urbanismo*. The second one, "Urban Aesthetics," emphasized the importance of the Cuban manifestations of Civic Art, such as the critical value of the plazas and historical ensembles of buildings, the importance of the streets and their continuity, as well as the adequate placement of monuments.⁵¹



Interestingly, it advocated also the integration of agriculture within the densest urban areas, whether in the form of satellite cities or neighborhood units. In brief, it was a unique document that promoted *cubanidad* in the field of urbanism.⁵² This theoretical stand anticipated, to some extent, the upcoming break-out of CIAM and the birth of Team X at the CIAM X in Dubrovnik (1956). In this postwar environment, Cuban architects and urbanists were moving away from the strict modernist orthodoxy. Like in Spain and particularly for the GATEPAC, the relation of modernity that Cuban architects entertained with the vernacular as a whole was not only based on single subjects of architecture but involved the urban milieu in its full complexity.⁵³

During all those years, Eugenio Batista maintained an intense correspondence with Sert, but the Catalan, now a major professional figure in the United States and Latin America did not come back to Cuba until 1953. With few personal contacts and lacking a license to practice, Sert began his professional activity in New York not as an architect, but as an urban planner. In August 1941, he met the architect Paul Lester Wiener who was married to Alma Morgenthau, the daughter of the United States Secretary of the Treasury, Henry Morgenthau. This alliance was extremely useful when they formed Town Planning Associates (TPA) and the Secretary of State Cordell Hull himself recommended them to develop urban plans in Latin America with a state department grant. This would represent the most direct source of work for the next ten years and a way to apply the CIAM principles on a large scale and in a different context. As a result, Sert became the liaison between the CIAM groups in Europe, North America, and Latin America.

The Heart of the City

You have united the Mediterranean spirit with that of the New World, giving the age-old patio idea of the dwelling a new meaning.⁵⁴

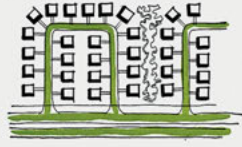
When Sert invited Lewis Mumford to write the preface to his book *Can Our Cities Survive?*, the presentation of the Charter of Athens for the American public, the historian and sociologist rejected the offer. While sympathetic to CIAM's objectives in general, he saw a "serious flaw" in the general outline of the four functions of housing, recreation, transportation, and industry, and he asked, "What of the political, educational, and cultural functions of the city: what of the part played by the disposition and plan of buildings concerned with these functions in the whole evolution of city design?"⁵⁵ Sert went on publishing the book in 1942, a hybrid and somewhat didactic work

that shied away from precise solutions and eventually did little to position the CIAM group within the complex reality of American cities and suburbs. Yet, Sert's standpoint about civic life, community values, and the importance of urban space would quickly evolve. In 1943, he signed, with Sigfried Giedion and Fernand Léger, the manifesto "Nine Points on Monumentality." Going against the socially driven attacks against monuments and grand-scale civic architecture as expressions of the "rich and the powerful," the authors asserted the need for a modern artistic and architectonic expression that would represent the postwar values of democracy and community.⁵⁶ If the Mediterranean—and particularly the vernacular of the island of Ibiza—determined the direction of Sert's vision of modern architecture from the 1930s onward, it was the cities of Latin America that influenced his postwar humanist conception of urbanism and the progressive return to the basic principles of the street, the block, the square, and the civic center. For Sert, as for Le Corbusier and Gropius in particular, the encounter with Latin America's authentic urban life and genuine public spaces allowing for social interaction across the society spectrum—what one could call the "Mediterranean" side of urban life in contrast to its commercialized Northern European or American counterpart—was a major turning point in the development of modern urban design.

Developed with Paul Lester Wiener, the plan for *Cidade dos Motores* (City of Motors, Brazil, 1943–1947) and, more importantly, the plan for Chimbote (Peru, 1946–1948) epitomized the revisionist concern with civic life and public spaces that Sert would advocate, emphasizing in other words the necessity of a fifth function excluded from the Athens Charter. TPA's drawings for the port of Chimbote illustrated a concern with local conditions, and a willingness to study smaller-scale alternatives, particularly patio houses, instead of the CIAM multi-story blocks that would not be appropriate in the Peruvian desert.⁵⁷ The Chimbote patio house and its extension in the pattern known as "carpet housing" or "mat building," hinted also at possibilities of do-it-yourself construction and prefabrication, two key elements of future housing schemes for the poorer city dwellers developed contemporarily in Morocco by ATBAT-Afrique and George Candilis, and in other Third World countries by Doxiadis Associates.⁵⁸ Chimbote and Puerto Ordaz in Venezuela were the theater of Sert's most intense experiment with the concept of the civic center and its associated "integration of the arts."⁵⁹ The civic centers were conceived, both at the neighborhood and the city-scale level, as enclosed and pedestrian squares that, albeit different in shape and language, reflected the urban principles defined four centuries earlier in the Laws of the Indies.⁶⁰

From patio house . . .

The typical American residential street of today looks about like this in plan:



Individual houses on individual lots, set back from a curving residential street.

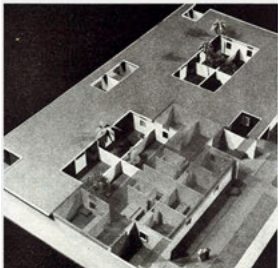
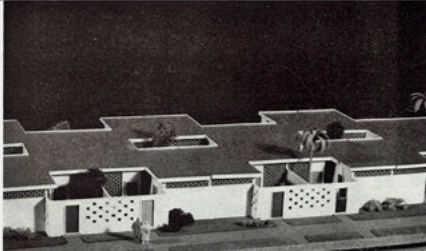
Wiener & Sert's handling of a residential block is quite different: they feel that this pattern wastes outdoor space, provides no sense of privacy for outdoor living, requires long and expensive utility lines, and provides little opportunity for coherent street design. In place of the rows of individual houses on individual lots, Wiener & Sert use blocks of contiguous patio houses. The houses are so planned that almost every indoor room is complemented by a walled-in outdoor room (or patio). Outdoor living is given a lot of privacy, utility lines are short, lots are small but more useful than the more traditional open lot, and the street presents a coherent, large-scale architectural pattern (see below).



Photos (right & left) by Eero Saarinen, (center) E. de Romera

Street in Cherry Point, N. C. (by Rowland Stone & Maxwell) has better continuity than Realburn because of the quieter, more sociable front of the houses. When the designer curves outdoor spaces with such individual houses, he gains variety and informality, loses the force and clarity of the Latin way.

Patio houses for Cuban redevelopment (right & below) have outdoor rooms to supplement enclosed areas, thus make excellent use of limited sites. Note use of traditional screens of tile to permit breezes to flow through entire house.



What Wiener & Sert save in land by making their lots tight and compact they turn back to the community by planning generous community patios (like the old village greens) at the end, or in the middle of each block.

. . . to neighborhood patio

These community patios vary in size depending upon the number of people they serve. They are kept free of vehicular traffic by off-street parking provisions. And they are always "walled in" by surrounding blocks of patio houses. Result: people really get the feeling of being inside an outdoor room, thus tend to associate with others more freely than they would in an "unframed" park area.



Richard D. Ashby



Neighborhood patio designed for new steel town at mouth of Orizaba, in Venezuela, contains patio church (see also p. 129), theater, shops. Note that paved center is broken up into small-scale areas by planting and changes in level.

Picture above shows the community patio grown to its logical maximum size: this is the neighborhood center—again a big, "walled-in," paved-and-planted patio, surrounded by shops, theaters, churches, etc. Vehicular traffic is kept out and gathered up in big parking lots around the periphery of the center.

▲ José Luis Sert and Paul Lester Wiener. Pages from the article "Can Patios Make Cities?"

The need for civic life and appropriate urban spaces became the central theme of CIAM VIII in Hoddesdon, England, under the title *The Heart of the City: Towards a Humanization of Urban Life* (1952). "As outside experts linked to the economic and military power of the United States and the artistic prestige of Le Corbusier," Eric Mumford wrote, "Sert and his collaborators sought to make modernism more acceptable by appealing to local urban traditions."⁶¹ TPA's projects were also part of a deliberate strategy linked to the Good Neighbor Policy established by Roosevelt in the 1930s. This policy intended to keep Latin American countries away from Fascist tendencies, and was adapted later to counter Cold War fears of seeing the socio-economically troubled continent tip into the communist camp.

In 1952, Sert and TPA got their first opportunity to return to Cuba. They designed a prototype neighborhood for the Cuban National Housing Program, that consisted of approximately three hundred patio-based housing units loosely organized on two axial directions on both sides of a linear but free-form park. The park had the potential to connect to other adjacent neighborhoods, but its primary function within the unit was to provide a pedestrian connection between the school and the neighborhood center, organized as a plaza faced by a market structure and a community center. The plan and the house typologies (one-story patio houses with two, three, or four bedrooms) derived directly from the Chimbote and Puerto Ordaz masterplans. The Cuban architecture profession must have

been surprised, and at the same time encouraged, when Sert and Wiener published a long article in *Architectural Forum* in August 1953, "Can Patios Make Cities?" which utilized the drawings of the Cuban project to explain the principles of a new organization of the neighborhood unit for American cities. Built upon the Radburn principles of separation of traffic and continuous landscape system, it was designed to respond to the socio-cultural and urban traditions of the South, the Mediterranean, and its extension to the Caribbean and Latin America:

Because every element of these cities is related to the basic patio idea, each city plan has an underlying coherence, a kind of trademark visible in the smallest unit (the patio house), the intermediate unit (patio greens, patio parks, neighborhood centers), individual public buildings (patio schools, patio churches, patio shopping centers)—all the way to the biggest unit, the monumental city center which is, invariably, a series of gigantic piazzas (or big patios) that form places of outdoor assembly for all the citizens.⁶²

Following a period of intense lobbying by Fulgencio Batista, Montoulieu, Arroyo, and many others, Town Planning Associates were eventually appointed as consultants to develop a metropolitan plan for Havana.⁶³ Referred to as the *Plan Piloto de La Habana* (Pilot Plan), the idea was to coordinate large areas of urban growth and expansion around Havana, while developing additional masterplans to promote and control the tourism developments in Varadero and Trinidad.⁶⁴ Commissioned by dictator Fulgencio Batista, the *Plan Piloto* for Havana was TPA's culminating synthesis of the rapidly evolving, and thus at times contradictory ideas, pursued by Sert and his partners. Praised for their concerted effort to manage growth and expansion, as well as to provide more parks and green spaces, the project received considerable pushback for its design ideas. Although very innovative within the context of modernist CIAM-inspired planning, the proposals for Old Havana and the Malecón would have been eminently destructive, expensive, and ultimately more fantasy than reality. Completed in 1958, the Pilot Plan was understandingly shelved by the Castro regime and its publication in 1959 marked the end of Sert's intervention in the Latin American panorama. By then, all of Sert's planning projects in Latin America had failed, from Venezuela to Peru to Cuba. As Eric Mumford commented:

[N]o longer *engagé* political participants in postwar Latin America, but outside "experts" linked to the economic and military power of the United States and the artistic prestige

of Le Corbusier, Sert and his collaborators sought to make modernism more acceptable by appealing to local urban traditions, yet found their efforts to spur democratic development by providing spaces for public gathering lacked local government support.⁶⁵

The Tropical and the African

Beyond the morphological and typological revisions to the CIAM doctrine, Sert's experiences in Latin America brought him to reconnect with his advocacy of the vernacular modernism, which he had advocated for in the early 1930s in Catalonia. As we have seen, Chimbote was a turning point as, for the first time, he abandoned the linear typologies of international modernism. Cuba gave him further opportunities to develop his concept of regional modernism, and, at the heart of the Caribbean, the modernist values of the "tropical":

[t]he architecture in Cuba is the architecture of the Caribbean, of the tropics, which responds to a certain climate and determined materials. Architecture cannot be defined as international or national but rather as regional and within its region I find in Cuba the most notable examples.⁶⁶

Weiss and Batista had, of course, initiated the debate, but by advocating the tropical, Sert opened the way to a more intense discussion and, ultimately, to a wider cultural interpretation of the concept, more specifically from the colonial to the tropical. In the text of a conference held in Palm Beach, Florida, at the beginning of 1955, Nicolás Arroyo argued that the traditional urban environments in Cuba were lessons in simplicity, sincerity, human scale, proportion, and economy: "just as the square was the center of social life, the patio became the center of the domestic life, placing all the rooms and important services around it."⁶⁷

For Arroyo, the arrival of modernism from the 1930s onward had interrupted the eclectic flood of foreign and often non-adapted styles. However, over the years, modernism was also transforming into "a new formula of eclecticism" that more often than not replaced the lessons of historic styles with simplistic clichés and formulas. In response, he advocated a return to "human scale" in architecture and in the urban community. The time of functionalist architecture had now passed and Cuba needed:

a more complete vocabulary, new aesthetic values; in them we will be able to find a more perfect harmony, more in line with nature, greater plastic freedom, a coordination of the

arts, and a freer use of form, texture and color ... in brief, a dynamic architecture, truly a good Architecture under the Sun.⁶⁸

Arroyo's concerns were widely shared, but also deceitful as more and more examples of international style modernism, albeit somewhat adapted to the climate, were changing the skyline of the city. Spurred by the Hotel Law 2074 that granted a gaming license to anyone who invested one million dollars in a hotel or two hundred thousand dollars in a new nightclub, hotels like the Capri, the Riviera, and the Havana Hilton, brought in high-rise scale and glass façades that advertised the arrival of fully air-conditioned rooms and public spaces.⁶⁹

In a country where extreme political opposites were rising, many architects felt the pressure to resist the growing intrusion of the North American money and presence, and the architectural style and methods of urban planning that its economic sponsors and actors—at the heart of which was the casino mafia and its American head Meyer Lansky—were imposing on the urban landscape. In an article published in *Espacio* in 1956, the architect Emilio del Junco, who had left the island to live in Sweden and Ontario from 1948 to 1956, provocatively made the case that “from Scandinavia, I have seen a different Cuba ... and this has allowed me to perceive the rich cultural heritage of the ‘Creole’ architectural style.”⁷⁰ Del Junco advocated the need for preservation of the colonial heritage and its modern continuation to combat foreign influences. Alluding to the urban past, he wrote:

We should not copy, but preserve and restore in a responsible way, what is artistic and valuable in [our built past], as well as develop a work that continues the tradition.... We should preserve Havana from becoming the architectural branch of Miami.⁷¹

Another influential voice came out from the new generation. Son of the prominent architect Nicolás Quintana, founder of the firm of Moenck and Quintana in Havana, the younger Nicolás Quintana was one of the participants in the famous iconoclastic bonfire of the Vignolas. He attended the 1953 CIAM conference in Aix-en-Provence where he met Sert and returned to Spain with him. He later became a member of the Team X movement. In 1955, he was appointed Head of the *Planos Reguladores* (Regulatory Plans) of Varadero and Trinidad, and in that capacity worked closely with Town Planning Associates. In a text published in April–May of 1959, Quintana quoted Bruno Zevi who, in his book *Saber ver la arquitectura*, rejected all

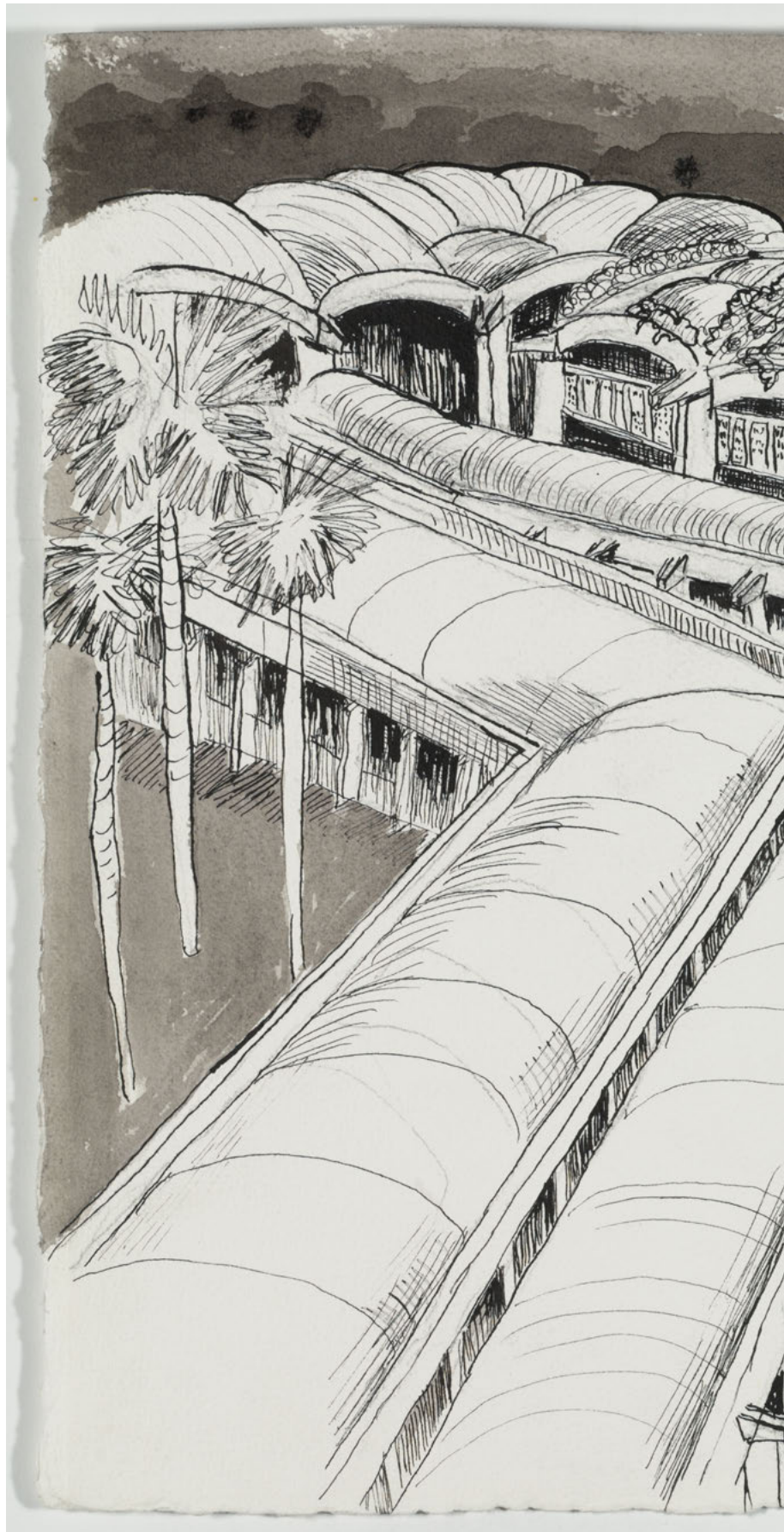
forms of architecture and artistic activity “which would remain isolated of the social growth of the civilization and of any type of construction that would not serve at improving Life.”⁷² According to Quintana, “in Cuba there was no structured architectural movement” and he advocated the necessity of a new humanism in architecture and urban planning that would establish the social needs of men and women at its center.

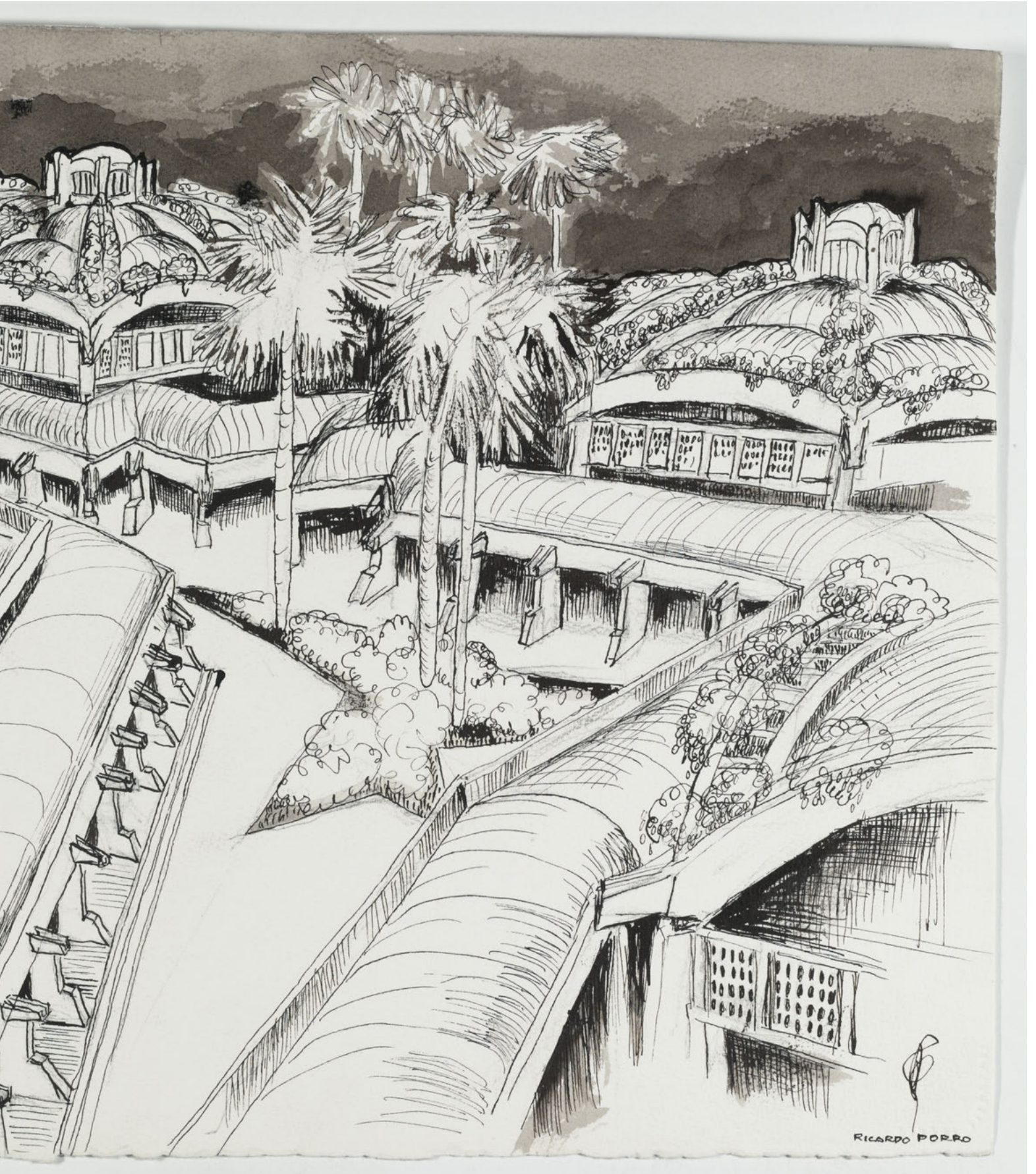
Quintana argued that the real roots of Cuban architecture emphasized space more than forms and details, and that a full-fledged spatial analysis—including proportions, scale, homogeneity, continuity, contrast—was needed to create a genuine Cuban modern architecture.⁷³ He outlined three trends in Cuban architecture—the romantic-formalist, the structuralist, and the organic human—that he described as “a new conscience, accompanied with a deeper humility” and that he illustrated with examples by Emilio Fernández, Fernando Salinas, Raúl González Romero, and Frank Martínez.⁷⁴ Following the lessons of Sert, architecture and urbanism needed a spatial continuity, because “the exterior of the house is the interior of the town.”⁷⁵ The supreme example was thus the Cuban town of Trinidad, a miracle of an environment unified with a clear homogeneity. Its low-scale narrow streets and fully hospitable urban spaces, with their traditional patio-based fabric could be envisioned as a basic typology for a genuinely Cuban modern city. Quintana's reference to Fernando Salinas was important as the young architect became a leading voice in the definition and the role of architecture under a revolutionary spirit.⁷⁶

A few years earlier, in 1951, the twenty-six-year-old architect Ricardo Porro won a fellowship from the French government to pursue postgraduate studies in Paris. At the same time, the Cuban College of Architects awarded him a travel grant to further extend his voyage across Europe, and particularly go to Italy. While in Paris for his post-graduate studies at the *Institut d'Urbanisme*, he regularly visited Wifredo Lam, the Chinese-Cuban artist whose work, as Narciso Menocal wrote, “touched upon the essence of black hagiography.”⁷⁷ Black culture was a major theme for the Cuban artist, who, after World War II, eventually exposed the profound essence of his painting through its exploration of Afro-Cuban religion and practices. In Paris, Porro also embraced Marxism, a political direction that reinforced his vision of a new democratic architecture in Cuba.

Back on the island, he experimented with sensual forms for the design of two residences, the feminine Cristina Abad's house in 1954 and the masculine Timothy James Ennis's house of 1957.⁷⁸ His vision of architectural *cubanidad* owed a lot to the works and teachings of Batista, but eventually differed greatly from his teacher's main tenets. He remained truthful to many

► Ricardo Porro. *Escuelas Nacionales de Arte de la Habana – Cuba*, aerial perspective sketch (1961).





elements of Cuban modernism, such as the *vitrales* and the filtered light, but he embraced freer and more sensual forms that were, to some extent, a Latin response to Bruno Zevi's organic architecture and a Cuban follow-up to the multiracial architecture of Oscar Niemeyer in Brazil. It is in the periodical *Nuestro Tiempo* that Porro published his influential essay "El sentido de la tradición" (The meaning of tradition) in 1957. The journal was published by the *Sociedad Cultural Nuestro Tiempo*, an association created in 1951, in the politically polarized climate of the early 1950s, by a group of intellectuals, mixing classical musicians and artists from other disciplines. Their foundational and anti-North American manifesto unabashedly endorsed:

an American art, free of political or religious prejudices, which is a synthesis of what we believe is valid and permanent in America. We are the voice of a new generation that emerges at a time when violence, despair and death want to be taken as the only solutions.⁷⁹

Inspired by the work of Lam and other Cuban painters and artists who were increasingly building on the multi-racial roots of Cuban culture—the African heritage and, in particular, music—Porro's essay argued for another vision of modern Cuban architecture:

We are the product of the Spaniard, above all the Spaniard of the southern part of the peninsula, and of the black African. From here comes forth our character. The mixture of the severe and intense Spaniard with the black African has produced, in our midst, warm and easy going, a man/a woman of extreme sensuality.⁸⁰

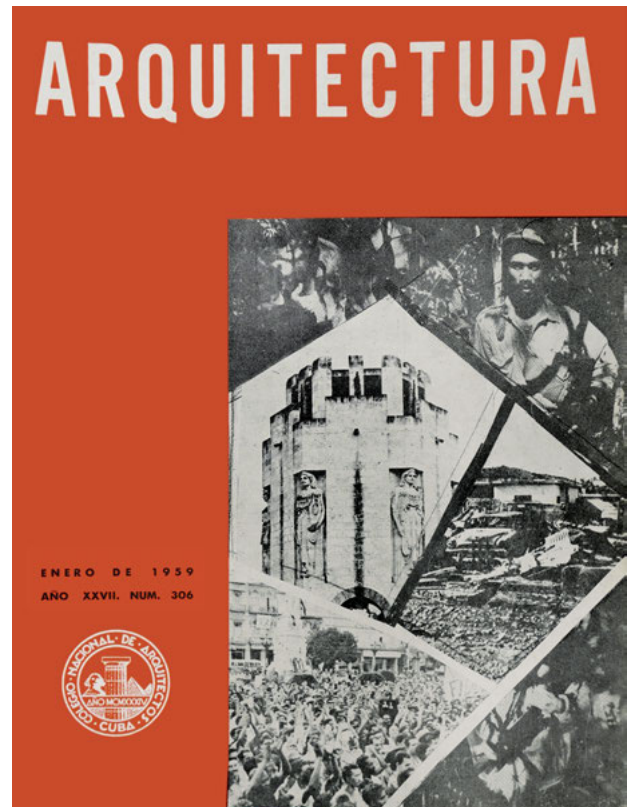
Shortly after the publication, he was caught in the aftermath of the failed general strike of the same year and moved to Venezuela. There he started to teach architecture and urban planning at the Central University of Caracas, along with Carlos Raúl Villanueva, the urbanist and architect of the new Ciudad Universitaria (University City). The campus included a new School of Architecture, completed in 1957 according to Villanueva's plans.⁸¹ It was in Caracas that Porro befriended the two young expatriate Italian architects Vittorio Garatti and Roberto Gottardi, who would later be his partners. Garatti left Milan in 1957 to join his family in the Venezuelan capital, while Gottardi moved the same year to work in Maracaibo and then Caracas. The three architects discovered a country in full transformation and its capital, Caracas, in rapid expansion and modernization with a rich cultural and intellectual life.

Two architectural figures made strong impressions on the trio: the first was, of course, Villanueva, whose architecture was an inventive modernist adaptation of the colonial material of Venezuela. He deployed the three identical "P"s that governed Cuban modernity according to Batista—*patios*, *portales*, and *persianas*—yet, here in Caracas, they were used to the benefit of a public architecture open to all and beautifully merged into the landscape. The second one was Italian architect Ernesto Nathan Rogers, a member of the Milanese group BBPR, with whom they had direct contacts in Italy: Porro in a CIAM summer course in 1951, Garatti as professor at the Polytechnic University of Milan, and Gottardi who worked with him for two years before Rogers convinced him to move to South America. At the end of 1953, Rogers became the new editor of *Casabella* and changed its title to *Casabella-continuità*. In his first editorial, he argued in favor of continuity "not only with the most recent heritage of the Modern Movement, but with its deeper roots (the work of the proto-Modern), and even with the whole history of architecture."⁸² The entire history of the city was at the core of his program, from antique and medieval times to, perhaps more surprisingly, the city of the eighteenth and nineteenth century, of which Milan and Turin were rich examples and that young professionals like Aldo Rossi had started to study and write about. As Manuel López Segura wrote, "any architect, not blinded by the avant-gardist cries against the historical city, had to be touched by the arcades, the galleries and the profound shadowed entrances open to the cortile; that is, by an urbanity conveying an extraordinary civic sense, a deep *espressione di civiltà* (expression of civility)."⁸³ The teachings of Rogers must have deeply influenced the young architects, and particularly Porro who was not foreign to the Cuban discourse about tradition and modernity:

[E]rnesto Rogers always talked about the environmental preexistence. As a teacher, he made me stick my head into what this term meant: the fact that one is going to build in a place where there are things and also people ... It can be an urban landscape or a natural landscape ... This is environmental preexistence. For me, this is fundamental.⁸⁴

It is thus the postwar Italian context and the debates of which Rogers was a major actor that encouraged many architects to challenge the tenets of the modern movement and eventually support "the climate of fervor and restlessness that found in the Cuban revolution a short-lived opportunity to consolidate the interests and directions of the previous decade from a leftist ideological point of view."⁸⁵ Batista, Quintana, and many others

► Cover of *Arquitectura*.
January 1959.



had undoubtedly emphasized the importance of tradition for a new architecture that would be at once modern and Cuban. Yet, Porro and his colleagues Gottardi and Garatti expanded the meaning of tradition by claiming other preexistences, origins and traditions, and in particular emphasizing the African influences that had shaped Cuban culture and art for centuries.

Following the Cuban Revolution, Porro returned to Cuba and in 1960 was designated by Fidel Castro as the head of design for Havana's new *Escuelas Nacionales de Arte* (National Art Schools, now known as the Instituto Superior de Artes, ill. p. 24–25, 206–207) on the grounds of the former golf course of the Country Club neighborhood in the western suburb of Cubanacán. Porro invited Gottardi and Garatti to join him in the ambitious and programmatically complex project. Although they were built during the first years of Castro's regime, the Cubanacán Art Schools can be directly related to the 1950s and the development of an alternative path to *cubanidad*—an “architecture, [that] instead of being international, is part of a local tradition.”⁸⁶

Architecture in Transition

In the January 1959 issue of *Arquitectura*, the Colegio Nacional de Arquitectos de Cuba (National College of Cuban Architects, or CNAC) advertised its support of the Cuban Revolution with a bright red cover framing a collage of black and white images of revolutionary combatants in triumph.⁸⁷ The cover was strikingly different from previous ones that routinely featured popular Havana buildings, and the editorial page was another clear celebration of Castro's victory, declaring the Revolution as the “savior of homeland freedoms.”⁸⁸ The relief and patriotism of the Cuban architects came through most noticeably in the final paragraph of the editorial, which ended with the well-known phrase *Viva Cuba libre* (Long Live Free Cuba!).⁸⁹ The College of Architects had been an integral part of the architectural community of Cuba since its formation in 1933. Its art-deco modern headquarters, a work of Fernando de Zárrega and Mario Esquiróz built from 1944 to 1947, was the embodiment of the growing professional community of architects in Cuba and the college controlled issues such as licensure, title, and architects'

pensions and benefits.⁹⁰ Apart from publishing *Arquitectura* (in April 1959 it became *Arquitectura Cuba*), the college actively promoted the achievements of Cuban architects, both through annual celebrations of *El día del arquitecto* (the Day of the Architect) every March 13, and through the annual *Premio Medalla de Oro* (Gold Medal).

Shortly after taking control of Cuba, Fidel Castro visited the college on February 16 and met with its president, Horacio Navarrete, and the Minister of Public Works, Manuel Ray, to discuss his plans for the Instituto Nacional de Ahorro y Vivienda (National Institute of Savings and Housing, or INAV), a new government agency established to carry out the provisions of the Agrarian Reform Law of 1959.⁹¹ The agency was given broad authority to organize the collective cultivation of land and to regulate all matters related to agricultural production, land tenure, credit and trade, in the hope of also creating job opportunities for those in the construction industry.⁹² In principle, the National Institute of Savings and Housing had three main objectives: first, to eradicate shantytowns like Las Yaguas; secondly, to build new housing complexes, both in the form of *casas baratas* (economical houses) and apartment buildings; and thirdly, to develop technical and economic solutions to achieve the aims efficiently.⁹³ The March issue of *Arquitectura* featured the meeting with the title "El Colegio de Arquitectos recibe al Doctor Fidel Castro" (The College of Architects receives Doctor Fidel Castro).⁹⁴ Castro's official visit, the first to any professional association, confirmed the CNAC's strong support of the revolution, as well as the artistic and intellectual avant-garde's mutual backing of the revolutionary government.

The abrupt end of private commissions in 1959 propelled the architectural community into a sudden crisis, as architects had to leave Cuba in search of professional work or find employment in one of the government's ministries, such as public works, planning, or construction. For those who remained on the island, the change in architectural practice did not represent an aesthetic or even cultural shift, but rather a social and economic one.⁹⁵ The profession would no longer function as a private artistic discipline dependent on elite and exclusive patronage and clientele, but rather would serve the social and cultural program put forth by the new government. But unlike the visual arts of painting and sculpture, to which the government gave much greater creative license, architecture would be subjected to persistent pressure by the revolutionary government. Architectural militias were soon established in the Colegio Provincial de Arquitectos de La Habana (the Provincial College of Architects of Havana, a local affiliate of the CNAC with offices in the same building) to defend against coun-

ter-revolutionary activities.⁹⁶ On January 28, 1961, José Gelabert, the Director of the Department of Architecture and Public Works for the City of Havana and recently elected president of the Colegio Provincial de Arquitectos de La Habana, set up a small exhibition of important quotes by José Martí throughout the CNAC headquarters to celebrate the birthday of Cuba's national hero.⁹⁷ At the same time, the College was preparing *La Gran Exposición de la Construcción Revolucionaria* (The Great Exhibition of Revolutionary Construction) to promote the many projects completed and underway within the first two years of the revolutionary government.⁹⁸ Communist members and militia troops led by the architect Arquímedes Poveda stormed the college and demanded that quotes by Fidel Castro be included throughout the building. Gelabert refused to celebrate Fidel Castro on José Martí's birthday and took down the leader's quotes.⁹⁹ The president was forcibly removed from the premises and declared a traitor along with his wife, Rosa Navia, and two other executive committee members.¹⁰⁰

This event was largely a response to the increasing divide between those Cuban architects who supported the new regime and those who voiced opposition to it, but it also reflected the growing disappointment with the many leading architects and architectural educators who fled from Cuba. The US government had already issued a partial trade embargo with Cuba on October 15, 1960, and President Kennedy declared in his first press conference following his inauguration that he would not negotiate with Fidel Castro while Cuba was in the grip of Communism. After Cuba's nationalization of major banks and enterprises, the United States retaliated by declaring a full embargo on April 25, 1961. This effectively wiped out any remaining architectural practices on the island and going forward, the economic squeeze resulted in the severe reduction of building materials such as steel and timber, machinery, and mechanical equipment. Therefore, the attack on the CNAC headquarters was not just a symbolic act but more importantly, one that initiated the demise of the venerable institution.

Tradition and Prefabrication

In the wake of the defunct College of Architects, Fidel Castro began to articulate his position with respect to artistic endeavors through a series of meetings held at the *Sálón de Actos* (Auditorium) of the National Library (on June 16, 23, and 30, 1961) that included nearly the entire community of artists and intellectuals in Havana and further afield. These gatherings resulted in his famous speech, *Palabras a los intelectuales* (Words to the Intellectuals), which he delivered on the last day of the meetings.¹⁰¹ Castro addressed the censorship concerns that



▲ Emilio Sanchez. *Las Yaguas* (informal settlement), lithograph (1956).



artists and other intellectuals had raised, noting that, “[t]he fear has been stirred up here that the Revolution could stifle that freedom, whether the Revolution is going to smother the creative spirit of writers and artists.” He further suggested that, “[t]he economic and social revolution must inevitably produce a cultural revolution in turn in our country.” He concluded with the admonition, “within the Revolution, everything; against the Revolution, nothing,” in effect outlining a new revolutionary policy in which art would be in the service of politics.¹⁰² As an example of this new policy, Castro cited the yet unbuilt National Art Schools. Despite his praise of this project, Castro’s agenda for creative expression would significantly curtail the ability of artists and intellectuals to express freely and openly any individual interest or critical independence. A new official organization, the *Consejo Nacional de Cultura* (National Council of Culture, or CNC, now the Ministry of Culture), was created to control the cultural sector.¹⁰³ Members of the newly founded *Unión de Escritores y Artistas de Cuba* (Cuban National Union of Writers and Artists, or UNEAC) were required to declare party membership in order to benefit from public opportunities. Architects were officially prohibited from practicing privately on November 22, 1963. They could only survive by developing an intimate relationship with government planning or construction.¹⁰⁴

◀ **Juan Campos and Lorenzo Medrano.**
Pabellón de Cuba, La Rampa, Vedado
(1963), exterior view.

Meanwhile, the Seventh Congress of the *Union internationale des architectes* (International Union of Architects, or UIA) took place from September 29 to October 3, 1963 in Havana, the first time it was held in the Americas.¹⁰⁵ A monumental pavilion to host the event known as the Pabellón de Cuba was designed by Juan Campos and Lorenzo Medrano on La Rampa in the Vedado.¹⁰⁶ The Pabellón was a simple and monumental structure consisting of two free-standing pavilions situated on either side of a high-rise apartment building and connected underground. Made of concrete columns and waffle-slab ceilings, the first pavilion was conceived of as an open-air primitive Cuban garden, whereas the second pavilion was semi-enclosed to house an exhibition organized by the architect Enrique Fuentes on the history of Cuban architecture in three phases—primitive and colonial; republican; and revolutionary.¹⁰⁷ A series of affiliated exhibitions were also organized throughout La Rampa by the

architect Beatriz Masso, and included the International Exposition of Architecture, Cuban Painting and Sculpture, Books on Art and Architecture, Industrialization and Construction, Architecture and Film, and a competition for a memorial to commemorate the victory at Playa Girón (also known as the Bay of Pigs).¹⁰⁸ Finally, a series of specially designed granite tiles by some of Cuba’s most respected vanguard artists, including Wifredo Lam, Amelia Peláez, and René Portocarrero, as well as younger artists such as Sandú Darié, Antonio Vidal, and Hugo Consuegra, were strategically placed along the sidewalk of La Rampa, underlining the new government’s commitment to the integration of the plastic arts in both public and private works.¹⁰⁹ As noted by Alfredo Rivera, “[l]ocated centrally between the Malecón and the Habana Libre Hotel, the Pabellón Cuba infused Brutalist architecture and sensual, tropical landscaping ... its massive prefabricated concrete grid ceiling upheld by repeating concrete columns, or pilotis, provide the building a sculptural, monumental appearance. It expressed a technological and nationalist utopia, one full of a revolutionary fervor reverberated in the spectacle of the congress’s opening festivities.”¹¹⁰

Cuban architects in exile pleaded with the union’s administration not to hold the conference in Cuba, asking for humanitarian intervention in the case of Alfonso Rodríguez Pichardo, a professor of architecture at the University of Havana and architect of the Museum of Fine Arts, who had been imprisoned as an anti-revolutionary, and sentenced to death in 1962.¹¹¹ Despite the protests—Pichardo was eventually released and went into exile in the US—the Congress took place in Havana, focusing on the theme of “Architecture in Emerging Countries.” It was attended by more than 2,500 members, representing eighty countries. Aspects of social planning, prefabrication, and Soviet-style construction techniques that promoted high-density housing were discussed at great length.

One unexpected initiative of the congress was the proposal to renovate colonial Havana under the supervision of the *Dirección de Artes Plásticas del Consejo Nacional de Cultura* (Directorate of Fine Arts of the National Council of Culture), with the architects Hugo Consuegra and Joaquín Rallo in charge of the works.¹¹² In particular, the Plaza de la Catedral, the Palace of the Marqués de Aguas Claras, the Plaza and Convent of San Francisco, and other public sites in the old city were singled out for conservation and restoration. Consuegra also visited Trinidad and Cienfuegos, ultimately producing a theoretical master-plan for future restoration projects.

In 1964, the publication of Alejo Carpentier’s essay *La ciudad de las columnas* (The city of the columns) coincided with

the emerging nationalist rhetoric that the revolution had put forth from 1959.¹¹³ In this context, *Habana Vieja*, or colonial Havana, appeared as an environment of defiance against the hegemonic architectural and urban forms coming from international modernism and the United States in particular. Carpentier's poetic essay was dedicated to the old city, its syncretic fusion of styles, and its invariant elements celebrated twenty-five years ago by Batista and friends—the patio, the portal, the *mediopunto* (half-circle stained glass window), and other *vitrales*. In the first of his sixteen essays written in 1960 during his travels to Cuba in the company of Simone de Beauvoir, Jean-Paul Sartre intuited the dilemma that was to guide the architectural debates of the 1960s:

[t]here is still this: the revolution attempts a beautiful architecture, raising from the earth its own cities. In the meantime, it fights Americanization by opposing it with the colonial past. In the past, Cuba invoked, against the hungry metropolis that was Spain, the United States' independence and freedom; today it searches its national roots against the United States and resuscitates the dead colonizers ... The revolutionaries have only clemency for the buildings built by their grandparents in the first times of Cuban democracy.¹¹⁴

Despite the proposal to preserve parts of Old Havana, the new architectural mandate that emerged from the congress was that the Ministry of Construction in Havana would resolve the ever-changing technical and social needs of Cuban society through prefabricated modular units throughout the island.¹¹⁵ This new approach paralyzed the National Art Schools project that was now seen as a symbol of “bourgeois formalism” and “utopianism.”¹¹⁶ However much Castro had exalted the Art Schools at the start of the revolution, their sensuous forms and high aesthetic value, rendered them irrelevant to the pressing needs of mass housing and economic restrictions. On July 26, 1965, the National Art Schools officially opened with the schools of modern dance, plastic arts, and ballet largely complete, and the schools of dramatic arts and music still under construction. Despite a highly articulate defense of the schools by Hugo Consuegra in *Arquitectura Cuba*, work on the remaining sections of the schools came to a halt. Both Ricardo Porro and Vittorio Garatti left Cuba permanently, and only Roberto Gottardi remained.¹¹⁷

From then on, the Ministry of Construction directed its focus onto housing, prefabrication, and the technical and economic challenges that faced the nation in the wake of the US

embargo.¹¹⁸ As noted by Louis A. Pérez, attempts to remedy these conditions began early. Housing construction expanded at a brisk pace, averaging an annual 17,000 new units between 1959 and 1963, most of which were located in the countryside.¹¹⁹ One of the enduring aspects of the new housing program—priority of the countryside over the cities, and the provinces over the capital—was established early and sustained throughout. Among the large-scale public housing projects carried out under the Ministry of Construction and the INAV, several were simply continued from the Batista period. The newly opened tunnel under the Havana harbor in 1958 enabled the development of Eastern Havana with the *Unidad Vecinal No. 1* from 1959–1961 being among the most high-profile projects.¹²⁰ Designed by Mario González, Hugo D'Acosta, Mercedes Álvarez, Reynaldo Estévez, and a team of architects and engineers, this project in particular exhibited many of the architectural characteristics of the Batista era in terms of having well-designed apartment blocks of four-story low-rise and eleven-story high-rise buildings, set within a loosely defined open public realm.¹²¹ It was considered so successful from both a planning and architectural perspective that it was exhibited at the Seventh Congress of the International Union of Architects. Other projects in Eastern Havana followed, including the new *Guiteras*, and *Alamar* neighborhoods, and to the south, the *Boyeros* and *Fontanar* neighborhoods were also taking shape. Finally, between 1965–1970, Fernando Salinas developed an experimental house prototype using the Multiflex concrete modular system that he developed with his students at the University of Havana School of Architecture.¹²² Employed in 1969 at the suburb of Wajay, 18 kilometers southwest of Havana, the system consisted of a kit of parts with a support structure in the form of a central column that held up 6 by 6 meter panels and allowed for growth in multiple directions. In addition to the panels, there were prefabricated doors, windows, closets, kitchens and baths. The Multiflex was simple, flexible, and easy to assemble even though it never developed into a large-scale production system. Therefore it was eventually scrapped by the Ministry of Construction in favor of high-rise housing and heavy prefabrication technology imported from the Soviet Union. Despite the enthusiasm, many of the public housing projects failed quickly due to poor construction and infrastructure. The use of pre-fabricated building systems negated the idea that architecture was a form of cultural expression, and as a result, residents often let the buildings deteriorate. Likewise, the socialization of the ground in the existing city led to the subdivision and overcrowding of many buildings, particularly in Old Havana and Habana Centro, and the lack of maintenance accel-

erated the physical degradation that had already been noticed and researched in the 1950s by Town Planning Associates during the preparation of the *Plan Piloto*.

To amend the suburban and rural situation, a new type of housing emerged in the Microbrigade movement of the 1970s that Castro himself spearheaded to provide an alternative mode of building construction in which workers would build houses for themselves.¹²³ The state provided land, materials, equipment, tools, and technical advice, while the workers dedicated several years to the construction of their houses. Even graduate architecture students contributed to the process.¹²⁴ However, limited access to materials often left projects abandoned, and seldom did they contribute to the betterment of their immediate context. By the 1980s the movement had dwindled.¹²⁵

The End of a Profession

Architectural education in Cuba during this period had also changed dramatically.¹²⁶ The University of Havana had closed in November 1956 with the School of Architecture and Engineering one of the many departments that stood in solidarity against the Batista regime. On March 13 of the following year (the Day of the Architect), José Antonio Echeverría, an architecture student and leader of the *Federación Estudiantil Universitaria* (Federation of University Students) was assassinated following the failed attack on the Presidential Palace. Echeverría and another fellow student, Rubén Batista Rubio, who had been killed in 1953 during a student protest, became the architectural martyrs of the revolution, and their memory would live long within the architectural culture of the new regime.¹²⁷ The university remained closed until shortly after Castro's victory in 1959, though the other architecture school in Havana, the private Catholic university Santo Tomás de Villanueva, maintained its architecture program during the entire period.

In September of 1960, Hugo Consuegra, the Director of the Department of Fine Arts in the Ministry of Public Works, and the young architects Fernando Salinas and Raúl González Romero were given the task of reorganizing the architectural curriculum at the University of Havana, as many of the established faculty had departed the island.¹²⁸ They invited several other architects to join them, including the three that would design the National

Art Schools (Porro, Gottardi, and Garatti), as well as artists from *Los Once*, such as Raúl Martínez, Guido Llinás, and Tomás Oli-va.¹²⁹ This group of young talented idealists was intent on redirecting architectural education to conform to the cultural program of the revolutionary government, though many of them would not remain on the island long enough to see their efforts realized. In the end, they were too "intellectually oriented," and were replaced by more establishment figures, such as Eduardo Granados and Antonio Quintana Simonetti, who instituted a policy forbidding students from visiting the National Art Schools.¹³⁰ According to Consuegra, the romantic period of any revolution is its only truly revolutionary moment, and once the "romantic" has been lost, what is left is death and betrayal. He resigned from the faculty of the School of Architecture in 1966, eventually leaving Cuba in 1967 never to return.

As opportunities for creative design were increasingly limited, the reputation of the profession dwindled. Few architects could maintain a professional practice, except for a handful of recognized figures from the 1950s who remained after the revolution, such as Antonio Quintana and Fernando Salinas. The negative effects of the socialist housing model became a particularly painful reality as prefabrication was more often than not inappropriate to local conditions or incompatible with the traditional fabric of the city.¹³¹ Architects who supported the traditional building approach of the National Art Schools were considered "elitists" or "cultural aristocrats."¹³² Havana suffered too, as the new socialist program benefited the rural communities and provincial cities more than it did the capital, which at the time of the revolution had over one million residents. Few resources were directed at preserving the historic city, and instead housing authorities resettled the many indigent residents who lived in peripheral shantytowns, such as Las Yaguas or La Timba, into abandoned homes, commercial storefronts, or new rural communities.¹³³ And while the eradication of the indigent communities was considered a success, there was little left of the imagination of the city and its symbolic potential. Overall, the technocratic bureaucracy of socialist planning resulted in a conspicuously anti-urban and anti-architectural bias that remained largely in place until the fall of the Soviet Union in 1989.

