

THE ARCHITECTURE OF LUIS BARRAGÁN

The work of the noted Mexican landscape architect Luis Barragán will be shown for the first time in the United States in a color slide show at The Museum of Modern Art from June 4 through September 7. Simultaneously, the Museum is publishing a fully illustrated book*, the first on Barragán's work, containing an essay and detailed analyses of seven of his most accomplished projects written by Emilio Ambasz, Curator of Design and director of the exhibition. This is the first in a new series of slide exhibitions on contemporary architects to be organized by the Museum's Department of Architecture and Design and which will be made available to architectural schools around the country.

Barragán is one of landscape architecture's most refined and poetic practitioners. While his design approach is classical and atemporal, the elements of his architecture are deeply rooted in his country's cultural and religious traditions. As Emilio Ambasz writes, "Barragán has always endeavored to create an architectural language which would express man's eternal longings in the context of modern Mexico's natural and cultural conditions."

Among the projects which will be exhibited is El Pedregal (1945-50), a housing development where Barragán brought about the metamorphosis of a lava desert into a park and residential area. Steps and pathways were carved into the rock and water pools and stone walls were so carefully placed that the gardens seem to have been created together with the sea of lava. Barragán's own house, which he describes as "my refuge, an emotional piece of architecture, not a cold piece of convenience," will also be shown. Built in 1947, the house owes little to the international style of modern architecture, but rather is an elaboration of Mexico's provincial architecture.

*THE ARCHITECTURE OF LUIS BARRAGÁN by Emilio Ambasz. 128 pages, 94 illustrations (28 in color). \$27.50 clothbound; \$12.50 paperbound. Published by The Museum of Modern Art. Clothbound distributed to the trade by The New York Graphic Society, Boston.

Other works to be shown are the Towers of Satellite City (1957), which Barragán created in collaboration with Mathias Goeritz, five large abstract towers of varying heights and colors which are used as promotional symbols identifying a residential area and which counterpoint the distant hills which surround Mexico City; and Las Arboledas (1958-61) and Los Clubes (1963-64) residential subdivisions created for horsemen, both designed with an equestrian character. Las Arboledas features water as a continuous presence throughout; fountains, water tanks, and reflection pools express the element's sounds, movements, and mirror-like surfaces. Los Clubes is the site of one of Barragán's most accomplished fountains for horses which creates a magic play of shadow and reflections against solid and liquid surfaces.

The most recent work, which also reflects Barragán's love of horses, is San Cristobal (1967-68), consisting of a stable, horse pool, swimming pool, and house. The project, Barragán's most complex creation, is a micro-model of the pueblos he knew as a child, "the house, the plaza, the horses, the friendly trees, and water coming from far away."

Barragán's dramatically simple, richly colored architecture is both deliberately monumental and static in quality. "In the de Chirico-like settings he creates, the wall is both the supreme entity and the inhabitant of a larger metaphysical landscape: a screen for revealing the hidden colors of Mexico's almost white sun and a shield for suggesting never seen presences. His magnificent fountains and carefully constructed plazas seem to stand as great architectural stages for the promenade of mythological beings," says Mr. Ambasz.

Barragán's work is based on a few constructive elements bound together by a mystical feeling. The austerity of his work, however, is "exalted by the glory of his brilliant colors. They pervade all the interstices of space, at once binding and separating artifact and nature," according to Mr. Ambasz. "Intimately bound to Barragán's sensitivity for color is his animistic feeling for matter. He seems to endow matter with a soul of its own."

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Barragán has said of his own work, "The function of architecture must be solving material problems, without forgetting man's spiritual needs.

"I believe in an 'emotional architecture.' It is very important for human kind that architecture should move by its beauty; if there are many equally valid technical solutions to a problem, the one which offers the user a message of beauty and emotion, that one is architecture."

The Architecture of Luis Barragán is made possible by a grant from the National Endowment for the Arts and is the first of a series of architectural presentations based on slides. Under the terms of the grant the Museum has prepared ten similar sets of slides of Barragán's work which have been made available to American schools of architecture.

Color slides, photographs and additional information available from Michael Boodro, Assistant, and Elizabeth Shaw, Director, Department of Public Information, The Museum of Modern Art, 11 W. 53 St., New York, NY 10019. Phone: (212) 956-7504; 7501.
