LUIS BARRAGÁN

EXPOSITION OF HIS EMOTIONAL ARCHITECTURE IN GILARDI HOUSE

NIA BONNAFON-MOSLEY

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INTRODUCTION

THESIS

Luis Barragán is credited with moving beyond the “sparse, planar vocabulary” of the International Style, introducing, instead, regional influences, color, and light sources as part of his “emotional architecture” intended to give rise to a feeling of serenity (Curtis, pp. 390).

BACKGROUND

In 1980, earning the Pritzker Prize, the highest honor for an architect, Luis Barragán is known as the pivotal figure of Mexican modern architecture. Mostly self-taught, he practiced architecture from the 1930s until approximately the early 1980s, in which his architecture highlighted the limits of the International Style to include regional influences and express Mexican Surrealism.

PHILOSOPHICAL BELIEF

As Curtis (1982) stated in Modern Architecture: Since 1900, Barragán believed that “any work of architecture which does not express serenity is a mistake.” Although he thought of himself as moving away from the International Style, Luis Barragán was a proto-regional designer, who highlighted the limits of the International Style and functionalism in his “emotional architecture.”

DESIGN LANGUAGE

Barragán employed proto-regional themes such as color and textured walls as well as variations on the Mexican outdoor habitat like “the outdoor room, the platform and the secret interior” that moved beyond the machine symbolism of the International Style (Curtis, p. 390). Specifically, his style sought to move past the structural aesthetics of the form into the experience the form provided, tranquil spaces capable of evoking feeling through the use of “his favorite ‘materials’: water and light” (Riggen Martínez, p. 136).
The attention of this exposition is given to the Gilardi House, designed in 1975 in Colonia San Miguel Chapultepec, Mexico City, for Francisco Gilardi. Barragán employed “introverted composition,” in which the main windows face the interior spaces of the grounds in order to control the views and foster tranquility (website). Particularly, the main attraction is that of the indoor pool on the ground level of the house.

As a result, the Gilardi House greatly emphasizes the use of color, light, and controlled planes to further enhance the experience of the house.

The exposition of the interior, exterior and object focus of the Gilardi House highlight the sense of Barragán’s metaphorical architecture. The study aims to summarize the architect’s metaphorical style in conjunction to his move beyond the simplifications of International Style.

EXTERIOR

The exterior of the Gilardi House is the first recognizable difference used to distinguish Barragán moving beyond the “sparse, planar vocabulary” of the International Style into his metaphorical vernacular (Curtis, p. 390). Most, if not all, of Barragán’s designs specifically feature color, a huge distinction from the whitewashed reinforced-concrete forms of the International Style. “The primary element of Barragán’s architecture was the simple rectangular plane drenched in bright color;” moreover, the Gilardi House features a bright pink exterior, as seen from the street façade as well as the interior patio and a yellow rectangular plane, which further “[articulated] the rituals of the private interior” (Curtis, p. 497). The color textured walls and introduction of the patio represent key characteristics Barragán’s regional influences.
INTERIOR

In the interior of the corridor leading to the indoor pool, one of Barragán’s favorite “materials” is used, light. As seen on the exterior, the use of yellow continues into the interior of the Gilardi House as part of religious ceremony. The series of yellow pillars in the corridor are windows of colored glass (Riggen Martínez, p. 155). In Luis Barragán: Mexico’s Modern Master, 1902-1988 (1996), Barragán stated, “light is the origin of everything. But no one is allowed to look at it directly, unless contemplation of the cross in the chapel itself” (p. 155). Moreover, the affect of the external yellow light filtering through the series of yellow pillars was used to “[accentuate] the religious value of this passage” from one room to the religious value of the indoor pool (Riggen Martínez, p. 155). This, realizing that every room and every feature of the form was more that just a form itself but a deeper experience to be had, is how Barragán intended to express his “emotional architecture.”

FEATURE

The rhythm of the house centers towards the indoor pool. In direct connectedness, Barragán designed the experience of passing through the corridor to behold the indoor pool as one of religious ceremony to be had. The inclusion of an indoor pool and the use of “water […] has much greater importance in the villa Gilardi, because it offers the possibility of immersion,” which after walking through the preceding yellow-lite corridor of religious ceremony, one would meet the pool for “the ceremony of baptism” (Riggen Martínez, p. 120, 155). In this room, both of Barragán’s favorite “materials” meet and spiritually interact with one another as he had intended.
CONCLUSION

In the sense that the International Style focused on the aesthetics and regularity in architecture vernacular, Barragán aimed beyond the aesthetics of the form to provide and encourage the serene and religious experience in any given “room,” which also extended to the form in its entirety. Furthermore, he continued to go beyond the simplifications of the International Style by employing regional influences in his architecture through the use of color, light, and controlled planes.

REFERENCES


