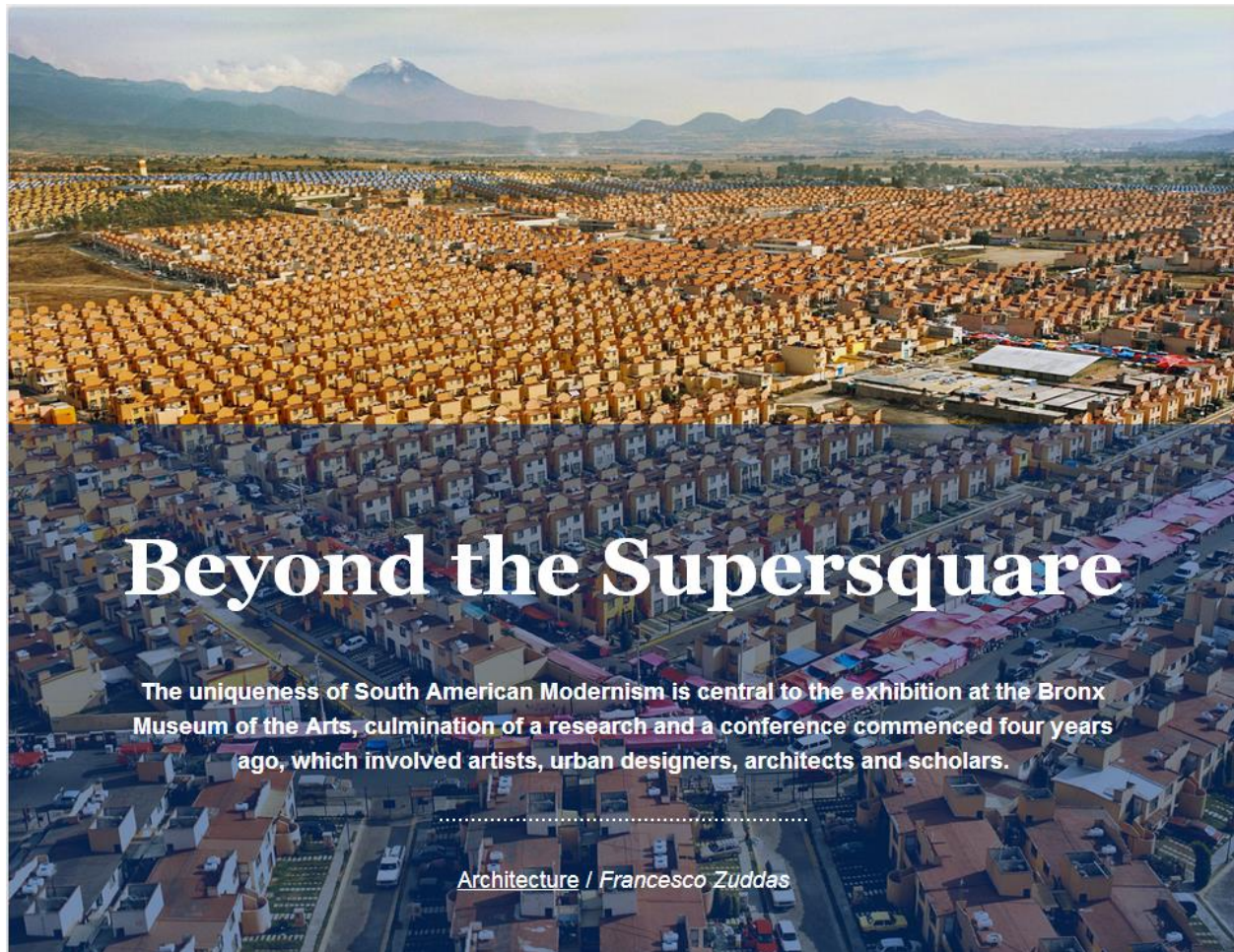


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Author: Francesco Zuddas

Latin America proved an extremely fertile terrain on which the Modern project was able to express its aspirations for social renewal in an approach to living space that seems to have been manifested more naturally there than in places that had postulated it as a theory.



Top: Livia Corona, from the series *Two million Homes for Mexico*. *47,547 Homes for Mexico Ixtapaluca*, 2007. Archival Chromogenic Print. Courtesy of the artist and Galeria Agustina Ferreyra, San Juan, Puerto Rico. Above: Alessandro Balteo Yazbeck, in collaboration with Media Farzin, from the series *Modern Entanglements, US Interventions*, 2006-2009. *Mobile for the Hotel Avila* and *The Larger Picture*, 1939-42. Two C-prints; mock construction plan of Calder's mobile for the Hotel ballroom. Courtesy of the artist and Henrique Faria Fine Art, New York, NY

The spatial and aesthetic rule professed by the Modern architects was expressed in an original manner in South American countries and, in its finest examples – Niemeyer, Mendes da Rocha and Bo Bardi, to mention but a few “classics” –, was marked by an ability, often rare on the Old Continent, to condense the ideals of social and technological modernisation by letting architecture interpret the natural landscape. It is no chance that, after the Acropolis and ocean liners, Le Corbusier’s new muse was not New York, the spatiality of which the Swiss architect saw as only a partial manifestation of the Modern ideal, but the formal structure of the landscape of places such as Buenos Aires and Rio de Janeiro, cities he thought should become both the focus of renewed colonisation efforts by the West and study opportunities from which to draw the means to advance Modernist spatial theories.



Alexandre Arrecha, from the series *Interventions*. *Opening ceremony "Habana Libre"*, 2003, ink on paper. Courtesy of the artist and Magnam Metx Gallery, New York, NY

This uniqueness of South American Modernism is central to the “Beyond the Supersquare” exhibition at the Bronx Museum of the Arts in New York (until 11 January 2015). The exhibition represents the culmination of research commenced four years ago and the key moment of which was a conference held at the Museum in October 2011. At that time, artists, urban designers, architects and scholars discussed the impact of Modernist architecture and ideas in Latin America and the Caribbean. They focused less on its avant-garde phase and more on its post-WWII application to determine how the long Modernist wave has influenced the work of contemporary artists. The greatest strength of the curatorial project lies in the decision not to aspire to a global retrospective vision of the Modern Movement’s architecture in Latin America, nor even to present its legacy via more predictable scrutiny of current architectural practices.



Maria Martinez-Canas, in collaboration with Rafael Domenech, *Bunker Series 004*, 2013. Pigment print, collage and watercolour on Arches Acquerelle 310 gms paper. Courtesy of Laura Blanco and Robert F. Sheinheit

Instead, the curator Maria Inés Rodríguez and the director Holly Block have taken the work of 30 contemporary artists, principally from South America and the Caribbean islands, and cast an eye over the Modernist legacy. This approach was combined with another concern, formulated as a question that underpins the exhibition: What is the current state of South American cities that grew under the impetus of Modernism? The combination of these two crucial issues – the legacy

in terms of artistic practice plus observation of the contemporary South-American city – represents both the original and the more conflicting aspects of an exhibition that sometimes pays the price of a totally convincing synthesis but is well curated and displayed in the refurbished Bronx Museum.



Felipe Dulzaides, *Interrogating Architecture*, 2012. Desk, microphones with stands and drawing. Courtesy of the artist.

Modern architecture and the modernisation process are often treated as synonyms, or at least two sides of the same coin. Although, to a degree, this correctly interprets the all-absorbing ambition of a generation of architects in relation to the potential and role of its work in society, it is an assimilation that inevitably results in the classification of architecture and its makers as the preferred scapegoats for the failure of a development ideal. In other words, it is a very short step from the exaltation of the innovative features of modern architecture to the condemnation of the urban squalor and incalculable problems of today's megalopolises. This is a temptation to which the exhibition cannot but succumb, reiterating via some of the works on show a contentious

discourse long in circulation but that struggles to express anything constructive with regard to what it is seeking to condemn. So, the weaknesses of the exhibition appear in video-installations illustrating places that highlight the ongoing spatial division of suburbs and that indiscriminately label an extensive array of contemporary urban spatial situations, some of which require more in-depth exploration of their unquestionable social significance in the city, as “Useless Landscapes” (*Paisaje inutil/Useless Landscapes* by Pablo Leon de la Barra).



Left: Patrick Hamilton, *Redressed Architecture for the City of Santiago. Building #2*, 2007. Right: *Redressed Architecture for the City of Santiago. Building #9*, 2008. Collage, B&W photos, contact paper. Courtesy of the artist

With the exception of these episodes, the exhibition becomes more interesting when it dwells longer on artistic practice and how this reiterates or places strain on procedures ensuing from the Modern Movement’s immense store of architecture, namely in works such as Manuel Pina’s *The Hope and the Rope* video on the process of residential self-building in 1960s’ Cuba; the

exploration of grids and white spaces in Magdalena Fernandez’s stop-motion videos; Fernanda Fragateiro’s chair based on a design by Clara Porset and Xavier Guerreiro, originally presented at the Museum of Modern Art’s “Low-Cost Furniture” competition in New York in 1950; and the minimal *Base Hierarquica*, in which Andre Komatsu presents the play of material and weights implicit to the modern idea of levitated built space on a ground liberated and returned to nature.



Mauro Restiffe, from the *Oscar* series, *Oscar 12a*, 2012. Gelatin silver print. Courtesy of the artist

The exhibition opens with a series of photographs by Alberto Baraya that introduces visitors to the theme via the portrayal of iconic architecture that has marked the post-war South-American cityscape. This includes Oscar Niemeyer’s works for Brasilia and, indeed, a photograph of Niemeyer funeral in 2012 – a ceremony spied from behind a “theatre-curtain” – ends the exhibition. This loss of the person who hovers like a spectre over the works displayed conveys the real hope of managing to go “Beyond the Supersquare”.

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Mario Garcia Torres, *Je ne sais si c'en est la cause*, 2009. Double 35mm slide projection and sound on vinyl record. Courtesy of Coleccion Patricia Phelps de Cisneros

Until 11 January 2015

Beyond the Supersquare

The Bronx Museum of the Arts, New York