

# ARGENTINE ARCHITECTURE

MIMAR's new correspondent Jorge Glusberg reports on a recent exhibition of contemporary Argentine architecture.

An exhibition of Contemporary Argentine Architecture, held at the Art Museum in São Paulo, Brazil in September 1991, highlighted the work of 24 architects over the last 50 years in Argentina.

The period has seen the strengthening of a cultural process, a real socio-aesthetics or 'critical regionalism'. Since the 1980s this has been defended by a number of architectural theorists – notably Kenneth Frampton and Kisho Kurokawa – as a model that promotes styles and orientations but is also able to reconcile the specific and the universal, starting from within (the zone, the country, a region). Kurokawa, who calls his version of critical regionalism 'symbiosis philosophy' states that the time has come to transform the international into intercultural.

The concept of critical regionalism was not new in the 1980s: it had been used 70 years earlier in Latin America by the Uruguayan Pedro Figari to destroy the harsh dichotomy between the uprooted and plagiarist internationalism and claustral and xenophobic nationalism. In 1912, Figari favoured the artist's obligation above all to give an account of the country from a regional viewpoint (acknowledging the communion of the Latin American nations, but not denying universal contributions). The artist is the one who decides what to accept and what to reject of the external languages, according to his needs and interests, to decode what has been adopted and to blend it with the given, in a creative

personification. Figari claimed that this resulted in an eminently critical aptitude and attitude on behalf of the regionalist creator.

In the 1940s, the American Lewis Mumford used the term regionalism to defend an architecture closer to man and his social and natural environment than that of the monumentalist and alien international style, in which he found a corruption of the original propositions of the Modern Movement, a sort of contemporary historicism. According to Mumford, regionalism had to do with just one country, the United States. For those architectural theoreticians who revived and developed the idea in the 1980s, regionalism neither had, nor should have had any precise limits: it happens, they maintained, as a result of social and political affinities to which the creators should respond. However, the starting point is similar to that of Mumford and Figari, the first doctrine of critical regionalism: it is about localizing the universal and 'universalizing' the local. It is Frampton who highlights "the critical regionalist discourse dimension" in our country.<sup>1</sup>

The first signs of this discourse in Latin America appeared in Argentina in 1915, with the founding of *Architecture Magazine* (1915). Also around this time, Hungarian Juan Kronfus started to revive the architectural past. Other key events included the inappropriately named 'neo-colonialism' of the 1920s; the work of Alejandro Virasoro (1920-32); the modernism of the 1930s prefaced by Le Corbusier's lectures in Buenos Aires (1929); the Austral

Group in 1939, and the second visit of Corbu, whose work included the Director Plan of Buenos Aires, made public in 1947. The projects of Amancio Williams; the University Campus in Tucumán (1950-52), of Eduardo Sacriste, Horacio Caminos and Jorge Vivanco and the work of the three bureaux opened in the 1930s precipitated the strengthening of regionalism.

The last 50 years of consolidation of critical regionalism in Argentina can be divided into three stages: the pioneer stage (1941-55); the intermediate stage (1956-70); and the affirmation stage which began in 1971.

The studies selected for the São Paulo exhibition comprehensively reflect these interdependent successive currents. The stage which began around 1941 can be characterized as totally Argentine. By that time, the establishment of European architects in Argentina had ended; the practice of studying in Europe had been abandoned at the turn of the century.

This did not herald the end of external influences, however. On the contrary, such influences are now more immediate, aided by the swift growth of communications. However, as far as the critical regionalism discourse is concerned, they are over.

Even though we see in these studies the signs of rationalism, organicism, neo-expressionism, brutalism and variations of postmodernism, the pretension to individualize trends lacks sense and interest. The signs are not the starting points but mere components of an equation of multiple languages and, for this reason,

inextricable from the group.

From the initial pioneer phase, two important firms emerged: Asian & Ezcurra (whose founders died a decade ago but whose descendants continue practising) and Mario Roberto Alvarez and Associates, to whom we owe an immense amount.

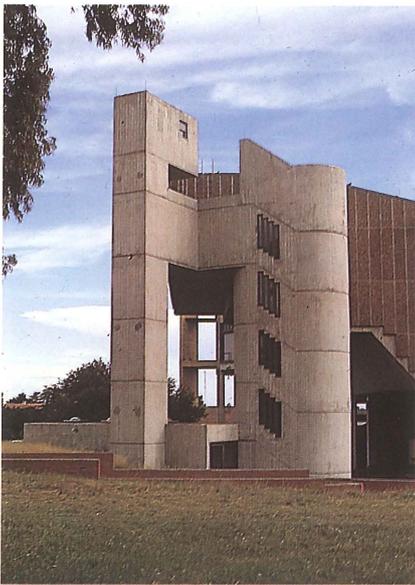
During the second period, the studies of Clorindo Testa had a strong influence. In 1956 he designed his first important work, the Civic Centre in Santa Rosa. Also influential at the time were Jose A. Urgell and Enrique Facio; Flora Manteola, Javier Sanchez Gomez, Josefina Santos and Justo Solsona; Antonini, Schon, Zemborain and Associates; Angela Teresa Bielus, Jorge Goldemberg and Olga Wainstein-Krasuk; Miguel Baudizzone, Jorge Lestard and Alberto Varas; Jorge Erbin; and Jose Ignacio Diaz.

The last phase saw significant work by several architects including Miguel Angel Roca, Felipe Biquard, Esteban Urruty and Alberto Marjovsky; Carlos María Casano, Alfredo Zubiliaga and Juan Carlos Poli; Sergio Casella and Jorge Galarregui, Carlos Dibar and Santiago Sánchez Elía (sons of two of the founders of the SEPRA, pioneer of critical regionalism); Fernando Horacio Serra and Jorge Osvaldo Valera.

Frampton has defined critical regionalism as a "culture of the resistance, giver of identity". These Argentine architects demonstrate this movement with a combination of talent, determination and spirit which has rejuvenated the range of formulations.

1. Preface to *A Brief History of Argentine Architecture*, Jorge Glusberg.

## REPORT



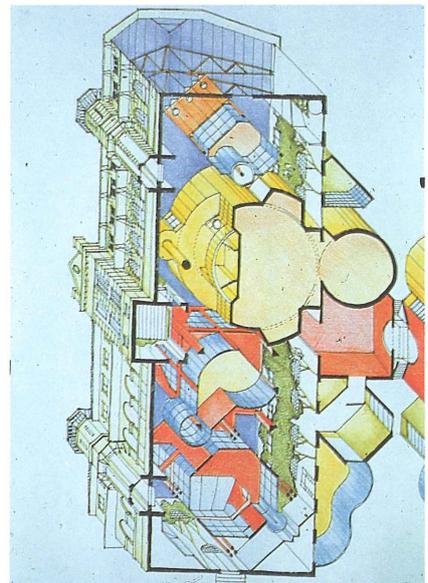
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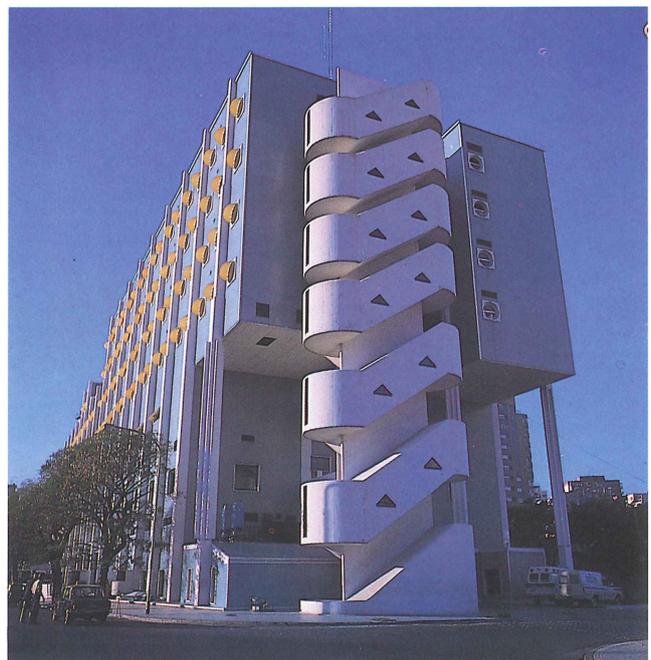
1. Clorindo Testa: civic centre (1955-63),  
Santa Rosa, La Pampa Province.

2. Jorge Goldemberg: mass housing, 3,200  
dwellings (1971-76) Soldati.

3. SEPRA (Sánchez Elía): Catholic  
university, Buenos Aires.

4. Miguel Angel Roca: partial plan of the  
refuncionalization of San Vicente market  
into a cultural centre (1981), Córdoba.

5. Clorindo Testa: central naval hospital  
(1979-82), Buenos Aires.



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