EDITORIAL

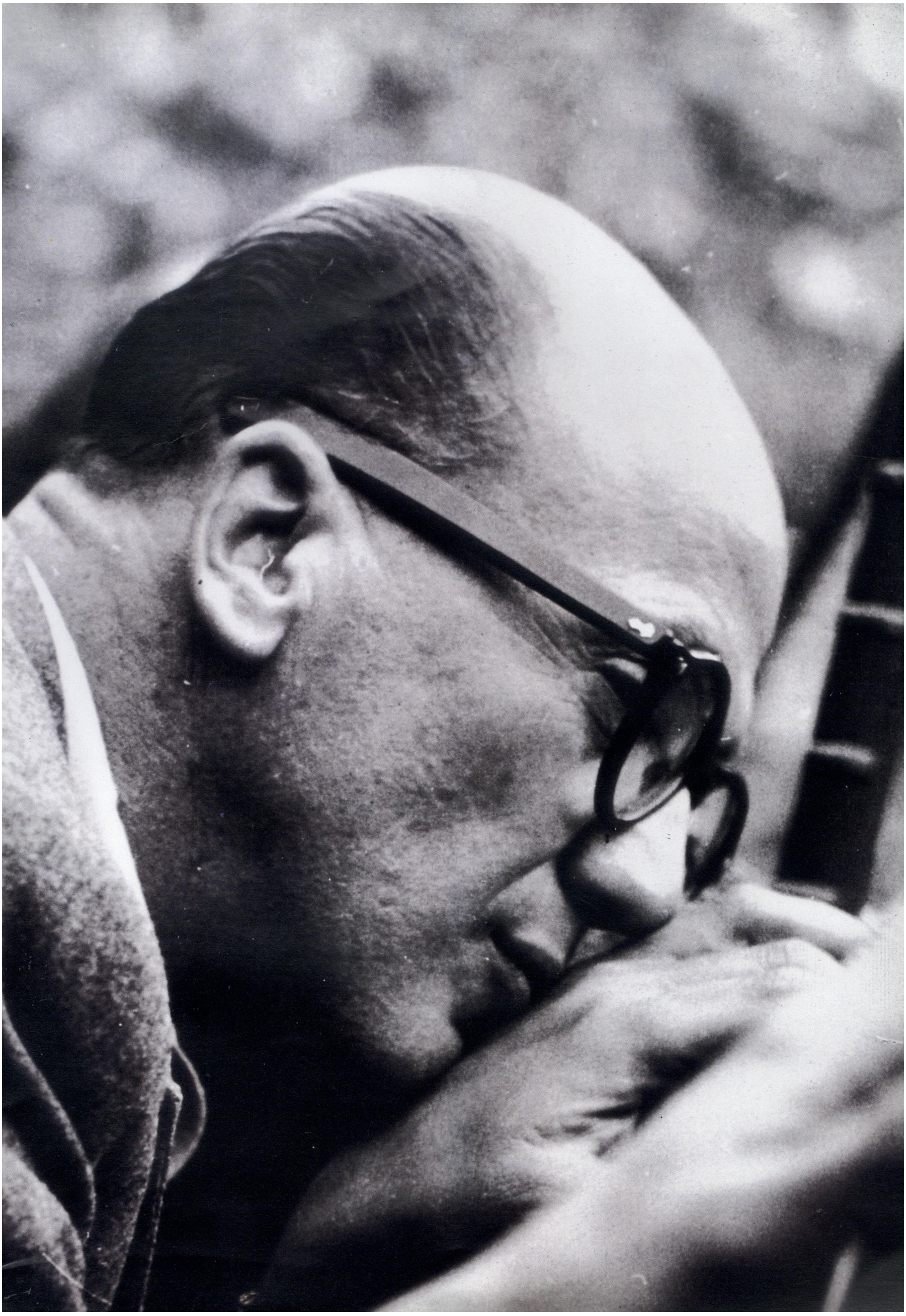
A DIALOGUE WITH THE HORIZON

ALBERTO RUY-SÁNCHEZ LACY

One privilege shared by all great architects is that they are able to modify our surroundings. They imbue a part of our life with the temperament of their creations. Indeed, our horizons would hardly be the same without the work of Luis Barragán. The forms he composed have had a fruitful effect, both in defining our sense of space and in the unique variations it has spawned among the work of several Mexican architects. In the future our times may well be recognized by the forms of Luis Barragán, as the nineteenth century has been linked to those of Manuel Tolsá. While neither of these two architects can be considered the only important or prolific figure of their respective era, there is something archetypal about the forms they created. This is why their works can be seen as emblems of the soul that describe the men and women of their century. This issue is dedicated to the world of Luis Barragán. Though it examines the man among his things, it also benefits from the entirely novel possibility of exploring diverse documents related to the artist. Among the different articles featured in this issue is an excerpt from a longer study on the personal library and archive of Luis Barragán, commissioned by the Jalisco Architecture Foundation with support from the Fund for Culture established between Mexico and the United States (the Mexican National Council for Culture and the Arts, the Bancomer Cultural Foundation and the Rockefeller Foundation.) A parallel effort was undertaken by the Jalisco State Cultural Secretariat to preserve and promote the estate of Luis Barragán by converting his Mexico City residence into a center. The house is perhaps the architect's most significant work; having now been acquired by the Government of Jalisco, it will be preserved as an important cultural complex. The house is a manifesto of Barragán's creative principles and a testimony that embodies his conception of the world. It is also an axis unraveling the spiral of breath that animates all of Barragán's work. To explore the world of Luis Barragán is to establish a dialogue with the horizon. For it is a horizon which speaks: it poses questions and it responds with forms, making the boundaries of our own world more livable.

Traslated by Roberto Tejada

Luis Barragán.



COMPOSING THE ENCLOSURE

A POETICS OF SPACE

LUIS BARRAGÁN

I find it alarming that architectural publications have deleted from their pages words like Beauty, Inspiration, Magic or Bewitchment, as well as concepts like Serenity, Silence, Amazement and Intimacy. All of these are nestled in my soul and though I am fully aware that I have not done them complete justice in my work, they have never ceased to be my guiding lights. I would therefore like to present some impressions and recollections that, to some extent, sum up the ideology behind my work.

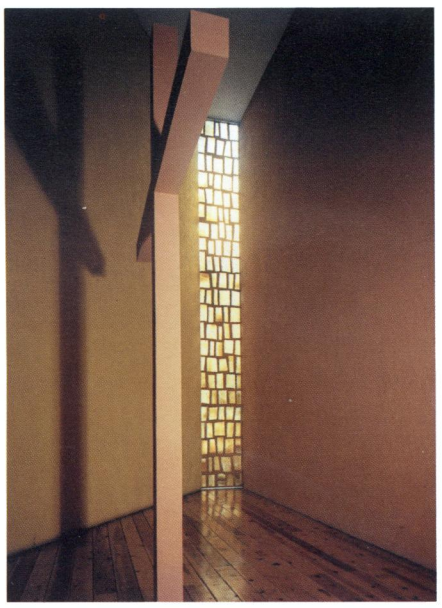
Religion and Myth. It is impossible to understand art and the glory of its history without avowing religious spirituality and the mythical roots that are the very *raison d'être* of the artistic phenomenon. Without one or the other there would be no Egyptian pyramids nor those of ancient Mexico. Would the Greek temples and Gothic cathedrals have existed? Would the marvels of the Renaissance and the Baroque have been produced?

Or for that matter, would the ritual dances of so-called primitive cultures have developed? Would we now be the heirs to the inexhaustible artistic treasure of worldwide popular sensibility? Without the desire for God, our planet would be a sorry wasteland of ugliness. "The irrational logic harbored in myths and in all true religious experience has been the source of the artistic process at all times and in all places." These are the words of my good friend Edmundo O'Gorman, and with or without his permission I have made them mine.

Beauty. The insurmountable difficulty that philosophers have in defining the meaning of this word is unequivocal proof of its ineffable mystery. Beauty speaks like an oracle, and man has always heeded its message in an infinite number of ways: in the use of tattoos, in the selection of adornments and their cultural implications, in the apparently superfluous ornamentation of everyday tools and domestic utensils, in temples and palaces and even in the industrialized products of modern technology. Life deprived of beauty is not worthy of being called human.

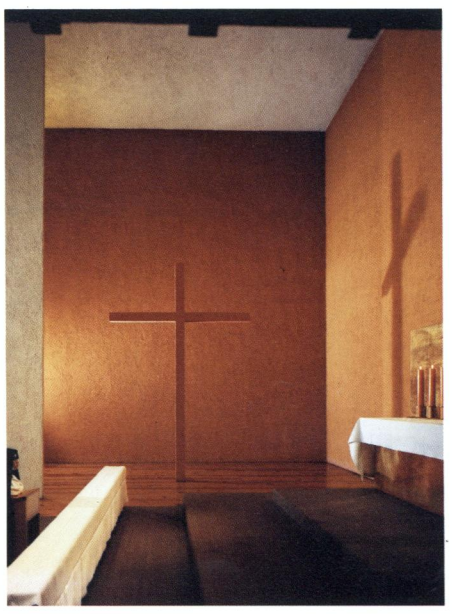
Silence. In the gardens and homes I have designed, I have always endeavored to allow for the placid murmur of silence. In my fountains, silence sings.

Solitude. Only through an intimate communion with solitude can man find himself. Solitude is good company and my architecture is not for those who fear or shun it.



Tres vistas del Convento de las Capuchinas Sacramentarias del Purísimo Corazón de María.

Página siguiente: Casa Eduardo Prieto López. Jardines del Pedregal, San Ángel, México, D.F.



Serenity. Serenity is the great and true antidote to anguish and fear, and today, more than ever, it is the architect's duty to make it a permanent guest in any home, regardless of how sumptuous or how humble. Throughout my work I have always strived to achieve serenity; however, one must be on guard not to destroy it by the use of an indiscriminate palette.

Joy. How can one forget joy? I believe that a work of art reaches perfection when it conveys silent joy and serenity.

Death. The certainty of death is the spring of action and therefore of life. In the implicit religious elements of art, life triumphs over death.

Gardens. In the creation of a garden, the architect invites the partnership of the Kingdom of Nature. In a beautiful garden, the majesty of Nature is ever present, but it is reduced to human proportions and thus transformed into the most efficient haven against the aggressive tendencies of contemporary life.

Ferdinand Bac taught us that "the soul of gardens puts the greatest amount of serenity at man's disposal," and it is to him that I am indebted for my longing to create a perfect garden. He said, speaking of his gardens at Les Colombières, "in this small domain, I have done nothing else but join the ancient solidarity to which we are all subject: to materially express a sentiment, common to many men in search of links with nature, by creating a place of repose, of peaceable pleasure." It would seem, therefore, that a garden must combine the poetic and the mysterious with a feeling of serenity and joy. There is no stronger expression of vulgarity than a vulgar garden.

To the south of Mexico City lies a vast extension of volcanic rock, and, overwhelmed by the beauty of this landscape, I decided to create a series of gardens to humanize, without destroying, its magic. While walking along the lava crevices, under the shadow of imposing ramparts of once live volcanic rock, I suddenly discovered to my astonishment small, secret green valleys—the shepherds call them "jewels"—surrounded and enclosed by the most fantastic, capricious rock formations wrought of soft, melted rock by the onslaught of powerful prehistoric winds. The unexpected discovery of these "jewels" gave me a sensation similar to that experienced when, having walked through a dark and narrow tunnel of the Alhambra, I suddenly emerged into the serene, silent and solitary Patio of the Myrtles hidden in the recesses of that ancient palace. Somehow I had the feeling that it enclosed what a perfect garden—no matter its size—should enclose: nothing less than the entire Universe.

This memorable epiphany has always been with me, and it is not by mere chance that my first garden and all those that followed are attempts to echo the immense lesson to be derived from the esthetic wisdom of the Spanish Moors.

Fountains. A fountain brings us peace, joy and restful sensuality and reaches the epitome of its very essence when its bewitching powers stir dreams of distant worlds.

While awake or when sleeping, the sweet memories of marvelous fountains have accompanied me throughout my life. I recall the fountains of my childhood; the drains for excess water from the dam; the dark ponds in the recesses of abandoned orchards; the curbstone of shallow wells in convent patios; small country springs, quivering mirrors of ancient, giant water-loving trees; and then, of course, the old aqueducts—perennial reminders of Imperial Rome—which hurry their liquid treasure from lost horizons to its end: the rainbow ribbons of a waterfall.

Architecture. My architecture is autobiographical, as Emilio Ambasz pointed out in his book on my work published by the Museum of Modern Art in New York. Within all of my work lies a subtle tribute to the memories of my father's ranch where I spent my childhood and adolescence. I have always strived to infuse my work with both contemporary needs and the magic of those remote nostalgic years.

The lessons to be learned from the unassuming architecture of the villages and provincial towns of Mexico have been a permanent source of inspiration: the whitewashed walls, the peace to be found in patios and orchards, the colorful streets, the humble majesty of the village squares surrounded by shady open corridors. As there is a deep historical link between these elements and those of North African and Moroccan villages, these too have enriched my perception of beauty in architectural simplicity.

As a Catholic, I have often visited the monumental monastic buildings that we inherited from the powerful religious faith and architectural genius of our colonial ancestors. With a certain reverence, I have always been deeply moved by the peace and the sense of well-being I found in those uninhabited cloisters and solitary courts. I have often wanted these feelings to inspire my own work.

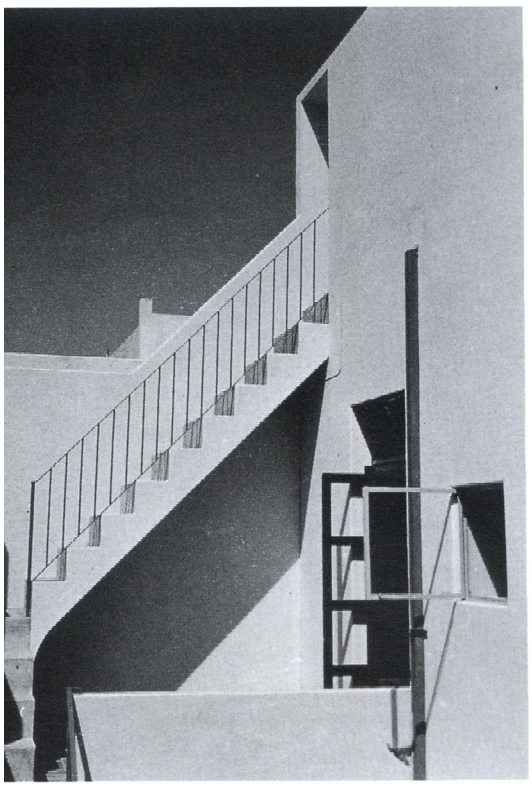
The Art of Seeing. It is essential that an architect know how to see; I mean this in such a way that vision is never overpowered by rational analysis. And in this respect I would like to pay homage to a very dear friend who, in his infallible esthetic sense, taught the difficult art of seeing with innocence. I am referring to the Mexican painter Chucho Reyes (Jesús Reyes Ferreira), to whose wise teachings I am highly indebted.

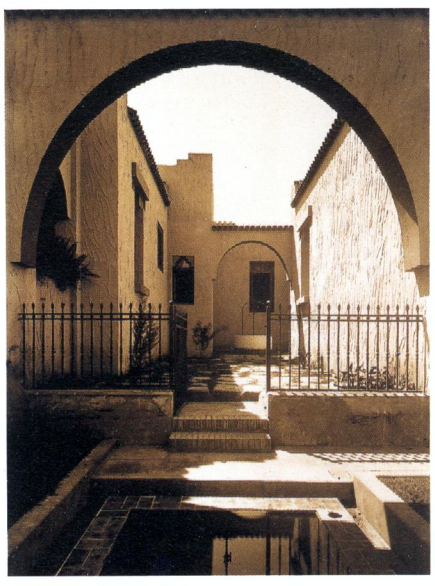
And it may not be out of place to quote another great friend of mine and of the arts, the poet Carlos Pellicer:

> Our eyes perceive the good
> and the bad.
> The unseeing
> are souls deprived of hope.

Nostalgia. Nostalgia is the poetic awareness of our personal past, and since the artist's own past is the mainspring of his creative potential, the architect must listen to and heed his nostalgic revelations.

My associate and friend, the young architect Raúl Ferrera, as well as our small staff, share the ideology which I have tried to present. We have worked and hope to continue the work inspired by the faith that the esthetic truth of





Casa habitación. Rayón 121, Guadalajara, Jalisco. 1934.

Dos casas de renta para Emiliano Robles León. La Paz y Colonias, Guadalajara, Jalisco. 1929.

those ideas will in some way contribute to dignifying human existence.

Translated by Susan Briante

ENCLOSURES AND COEXISTENCE

THE USES OF TRADITION

OCTAVIO PAZ

The art of Barragán is modern but not modernist. Though universal, it is hardly a reflection of New York or Milan. Barragán has constructed homes and buildings that seduce us with their noble dimensions and with their serene geometry. Equally stunning—and of even greater social benefit—are the streets, walls, plazas, fountains and gardens he has designed: something he calls his "exterior architecture." The social function of these works is not at odds with their spiritual goal. As modern men and women we live in isolation; what we need is to reconstruct our community, to reestablish ties among ourselves. We also need to recover the lost art of solitude, the art of self-communion. The plazas and groves by Barragán fulfill this dual necessity: they are meeting places and havens for seclusion.

Barragán once said that his architecture was inspired by two words: the word *magic* and the word *surprise*: "I want to be surprised as I walk down any street or stroll through any plaza." The source of his art can be found in traditional and popular architecture. His model is neither the palace nor the skyscraper. His architecture is rooted in the Mexican village with its streets, limited by towering walls, that in turn lead to plazas and fountains. Vernacular architecture in Mexico is a fusion between the pre-Columbian and Mediterranean traditions. Its forms are cubic, the materials used are regional, and the walls are painted in vivid colors (red, ocher, blue) as opposed to those of Moorish towns along the Mediterranean which are generally painted white.

The art of Barragán is an example of how to employ our popular tradition with intelligence. Many poets, novelists and contemporary painters in Mexico have achieved something similar. Mexican politicians and educators should follow in their footsteps: our nascent democracy *can* and *should* be nourished by forms of coexistence and solidarity that are still alive in Mexico. These forms are a political and moral legacy that we should revise and adapt to the conditions of modern life. To be truly modern we must first come to terms with our tradition.

Translated by Roberto Tejada

ENCLOSURES THAT CONVERGE

THE ALCHEMIST OF MEMORY

JUAN PALOMAR

I

As a contemporary artist Luis Barragán remains the elusive author of a handful of little-known, poorly-preserved artworks. A legendary character, he has been partially obscured by a thick veil of general ignorance and the hollow, disconcerting prattle of an intellectual's effort to understand him. The truth is that the architecture of Luis Barragán constitutes a milestone in twentieth-century art. His is an art constructed with resounding—and at times more subtle—statements including some equally well-defined omissions. It is an expression that can be rationally compared to that of another enigmatic personality: Juan Rulfo. It hardly seems a coincidence that both artists can trace their roots back to the same part of Mexico, to that vital node of mountains in southern Jalisco: the Sierra del Tigre.

The work of both men has aroused endless speculation and interpretation. Though sparse, the definitive body of work produced by these two artists seems to have had a sorcerous effect: to write about Rulfo or to explain and imitate Barragán are acts that have often served as a soothing exorcism. In a country of dwarves, how else can one deal with such manifestations of sensibility and superior intelligence? How else can one reconcile the meager efforts of their successors with the overpowering, almost religious shudder we feel when reading "Luvina" or when we enter a garden by Luis Barragán? There is a virtually ignored side of Barragán's work that makes this comparison even more disturbing.

In addition to his writings, Rulfo is also the author of a series of photographs, indelible images that shed light onto the resonance and many of the affinities to be found in both the economy and essential nature of his verbal constructions.

The scarcely-known existence of some photographs by Barragán reveals a similar (though less literal) process: from views of landscapes and conventional buildings, the images evolve into an infinitely subtle decantation of his own works. The architect's stature forces us to revise how we ordinarily regard the surroundings in which we live. As the children of monotony and disillusionment, as heirs to a modernist outlook, we fail to demand that our public places be something more than just an anonymous gray subsistence. The majestic control that ancient peoples exercised over landscape and space is

absolutely foreign to us. The Egyptian pyramids that deciphered and harmonized the cosmic order, the Acropolis that made the Greek apogee possible, the city that Hadrian built as an insignia of his empire, or the city the Toltecs built for the Sun, all reach our time as the detritus of an ancient shipwreck, buried under impenetrable strata. Their concepts and principles are alien to our eyes. Luis Barragán nonetheless knew how to drink from those remote fountains, decipher the old codes for those around him and awaken in those who read them the same wonderful recognition and the same sacred fear that kept Malraux awake. That is why for modern architecture Barragán was a disconcerting and dangerous figure, a definite outsider.

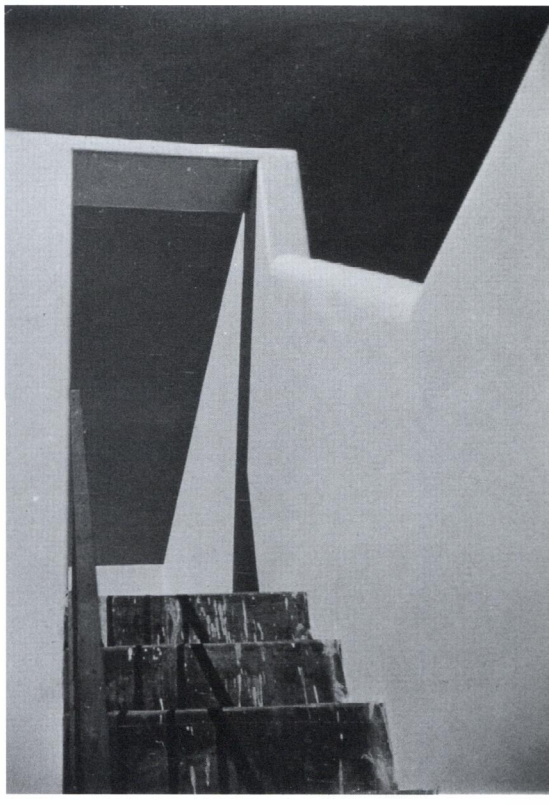
II

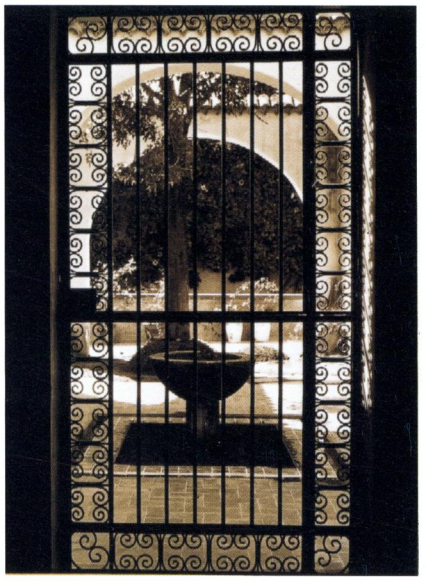
Luis Barragán Morfín was born in Guadalajara in 1902. His was a comfortable family of landowners with extensive holdings in south Jalisco. For someone of his social status, his education followed the customary course. The solid, sensible primary and secondary school training he received from the Marists and the Jesuits left him with clear options: a career in the professional fields, in the clergy, or in the business world.

Shaking off the typical lethargy of the Mexican provinces, Guadalajara had tried to enter the whirlwind of the exciting and progressive times by expanding its enlightened class, which (scarcely fifty years earlier) had begun to flourish among nineteenth-century liberals. Thus, the Escuela Libre de Ingenieros emerged as one alternative for students from Guadalajara who had no desire to move to the capital. Ambrosio Ulloa, the school's founder and director, can be considered a forerunner of twentieth-century architecture along with figures—according to that unique modern architect Siegfried Giedion—like the nineteenth-century engineers Alexandre-Gustave Eiffel and Robert Maillart whose work combined vast erudition and efficient pragmatism with the technical dominion of their trade and an unlimited faith in progress. The young Barragán emerged from this school at a time when the growing city was adding new suburbs. The latest residential concepts consisted of North American-style homes, detached structures on sizeable plots that resembled the garden-type lots of the British.

The city unfolding before the young engineer (whose true vocation of architect and artist lurked discreetly behind the practical, prestigious façade of his official title) would have made an excellent setting for an episode from the writings of the Spanish novelist Benito Pérez Galdós. The provinces, at once loathsome and charming, were weaving an apparently simple, yet infuriatingly intricate fabric which the new tensions in history would waste little time ripping apart. The building tradition in Guadalajara—a somewhat unrefined, utilitarian city—had always been solid and simple, though not without certain charm thanks to a lack of pretension and to irrefutable construction skills. Here, in a climate not unlike that of Spain and in a region where pre-Columbian inhabitants had left only insignificant traces—if any at all—the old Andalusian and Castilian traditions were followed almost unconsciously. The city's *criollo* nature and expression were modified by the French-inspired lifestyle which developed during the Porfirio Díaz dictatorship. This balanced out the ever-threatening North American influence—that symbol of progress and functionalism offered by those "technical" children of positivism as an antidote to the "magic" mentality of ancient Mexicans whose traditions, in their eyes, were the incarnation of backwardness and obscurantism. The French style (and, generally speaking, the subsequent eclecticism) which passed as European *fin de siècle* was adopted with an austerity and decorum that were hardly foreign to Jalisco. By the time Barragán began his professional career, however, those styles had become a definite obstacle, for they had managed to interrupt the course of tradition, clouding the powerful heritage of a nascent country trying to establish its own conditions for the future.

The essential dilemma of any architect—the search for individual expression—surfaced in Barragán as a subtle game of distant reflections. In those days local customs relegated all traditional expressions to a disparaging provincial level, favoring eclectic currents that were more or less artificial, if not entirely alien. The cogent intellectual generation of those days voiced its opinions through *Bandera de Provincias*, the magazine founded in 1929 by Alfonso Gutiérrez Hermosillo and Agustín Yáñez. Luis Barragán was both a fervent and active supporter, whose name was mentioned in its pages from the very first issue. The manifesto hoisted by its founders as the banner of a "group with no number and no name" read as follows: "...In the provinces the essentials of life, real life, should be lived. Marrow, heart. Far away from French and English. Close to the bone. To the problematic and to the simple. Integrity. Harmony." From the very beginning, the group's dynamic and scope were admirable: one example was the first Spanish translations in America of Joyce and Kafka by Efraín González Luna. This appro-





Casa habitación. Simón Bolívar 224, Guadalajara, Jalisco. 1929.

Casa Enrique Aguilar. López Cotilla 1505, Guadalajara, Jalisco. 1929.

priation of the most avant-garde cultural manifestations of the century, however, was duly digested and then kept in proper perspective. A perspective which, while both fueling and enriching the local creative environment, gave breathing space for personal expression: close to the bone. Subsequent productions by the group's members confirm this virtue. Another important parallelism was established between the early accomplishments of Barragán and others of his generation (Ignacio Díaz Morales, Rafael Urzúa) and the early efforts of the writers of *Bandera de Provincias*. Twenty years later, Yáñez' publication of *Al filo del agua* (1947)—the first modern novel in Mexico—practically coincided with the construction of Barragán's home in Tacubaya the same year. Both works mark the budding maturity of their respective authors.

III

Barragán's initial structures clearly manifest a search for identity and a process of self-recognition. In his chalets, though incorporating the new *maison détachée* concept—which differed from the traditional house built around a central patio—he attempted to return to a mode forgotten by the esthetic mainstream: the Mediterranean style. Curiously, this approach materialized from the reflections of two distant mirrors. One was the Spanish-style architecture being produced at the time in the United States by Addison Mizner in Florida, and by Wallace Neff or Irving Gill in California. While North Americans generally considered this tendency to be just another fad, it was immediately recognized by Barragán and his contemporaries. But Barragán was to find the other approach and discover a permanent path for his own personality in 1925 at the Exposition des Arts Décoratifs in Paris. There he met the French painter, garden designer, architect and writer Ferdinand Bac (1859-1952) from whose work Barragán derived a series of important confirmations: the Mediterranean heritage on the very shores of the Mare Nostrum, the joy and finesse of the non-Christian world—so hard to visualize from the Guadalajara countryside—and the basic respect that Mozarabic Spain would instill in him. Another key inspirational source was Barragán's persistent childhood memories of his father's hacienda, an image that was to accompany him and forever influence his work.

The influences manifested themselves in a series of projects carried out in Jalisco from 1927 to 1936—years in which the new cultural reality was slowly purifying Barragán's own personal form of expression. The house built for Efraín González Luna in 1928 summarizes most powerfully, perhaps, those initial years of quest and discovery. González Luna, a central figure on the cultural horizon of Guadalajara at the time, was the type of local aristocrat for whom it was possible to build a house that embodied a cultural backdrop shared by architect and client alike. Several interesting works of varying quality remain as testimonies to the quest of that period. The cycle was broken when Barragán was forced to seek horizons beyond those provided by the placid life of Guadalajara where recent religious strife, a corollary to the Mexican Revolution, had narrowed people's minds.

The exodus to Mexico City of which Barragán was a part, is a sad tradition that has emptied Guadalajara of its talent throughout the century. Given the financial difficulty his family endured when they lost much of their property after the agrarian reform, Barragán saw the move as a means toward solvency. The image of Rimbaud emigrating to Africa to become a trader may not be so preposterous after all: during his first years in Mexico, Barragán's buildings reveal an insatiable desire to make money. But this does not mean his works of that era are uninteresting. They reveal a sincere effort to adopt the very successful functionalist style and reconcile it with his already-conscious preferences and esthetic roots.

The Pedregal de San Ángel project remains a landmark in Barragán's esthetic journey and, generally speaking, in Mexican art of this century. As mentioned previously, it transcends the purely utilitarian end of building a residential development on land covered with lava rocks. It is the complete appropriation—both intellectual and physical—of a virgin landscape, the establishment of a new alliance between man and earth. This pioneering step shows the true future dimension of an artist in the eyes of the world, the true dimension of Barragán. The initiative, fatally destined to rapid disfiguration, despite some well-intentioned but flimsy regulations aimed at protecting it, lasted but a short time. There still remain a few photographs of the gardens that Barragán landscaped in some of the Pedregal lots. They masterfully combined scenery with a culture on a universal plane, to recreate the first fugitive garden: Eden. Some gardens featured a distinct Mexicanness that was implied not overtly or literally but through the subtle fusion of the ancient ceremonial centers of pre-Columbian cultures with the Recollet orchards and gardens of colonial Spanish Arabian design.

While no less important, other distant influences were the delicate Japanese garden or the romantic rearrangement of nature as exemplified by the English garden. The house that Barragán built for himself in Tacubaya follows, perhaps, a similar pattern: starting with a block of land where he first landscaped a garden, he subsequently designed two houses. The first, which he sold soon after, was a rehearsal for his permanent dwelling. It was the climax and synthesis of his thinking and his memories—one of the architectural masterpieces of the century. The house and garden are inextricable; every room is the result of lengthy meditation as to the most effective way to create the *mise-en-scène* that is born of memory and dreams. It is composed of three main areas. The predominant one is the living-room/library—subtly divided

by secondary partitions—which exudes both monumental nobility and domestic intimacy. The two ends are symbolic: at one, an opaque glass window looks out onto the light; at the other, a second huge sister window mysteriously brings the shady garden into the house. This garden is the second section of the house. Its powerful effect comes from its ubiquitous presence, even though it is only visible from certain areas. The third section is the open terrace above the library. In this inverted echo of the library (a place that seems to summon other images) only the ephemeral writing on its walls made by passing shadows records the time that is laboriously spent in trifles and small tasks that seem to belong to another reality: a reality both tedious and quarrelsome, prosaic and narrow, in which, throughout his life, Luis Barragán was prolifically present, yet at the same time conspicuously absent. ◘

Translated by Carole Castelli

AN ENCLOSURE OF FLEETING BOUNDARIES

QUIET VOICES OF INK: THE SPIRITUAL ITINERARY OF LUIS BARRAGÁN

ALFONSO ALFARO

for María Palomar

Arabia and China are met in thee....
BERNARDO DE BALBUENA

A French grammar bought in Havana in 1924, before the first great crossing of the ocean, is one of the founding volumes of the collection that Luis Barragán kept close at hand all his life. A contemplative, silent man, a man of light and space, this virtuoso of a wordless art was always a man of books. In the houses he built for his friends Efraín González Luna and José Arriola Adame, the library was crucial. But it is above all in his own house, in the home he designed

Jardín. Residencia de Barragán.

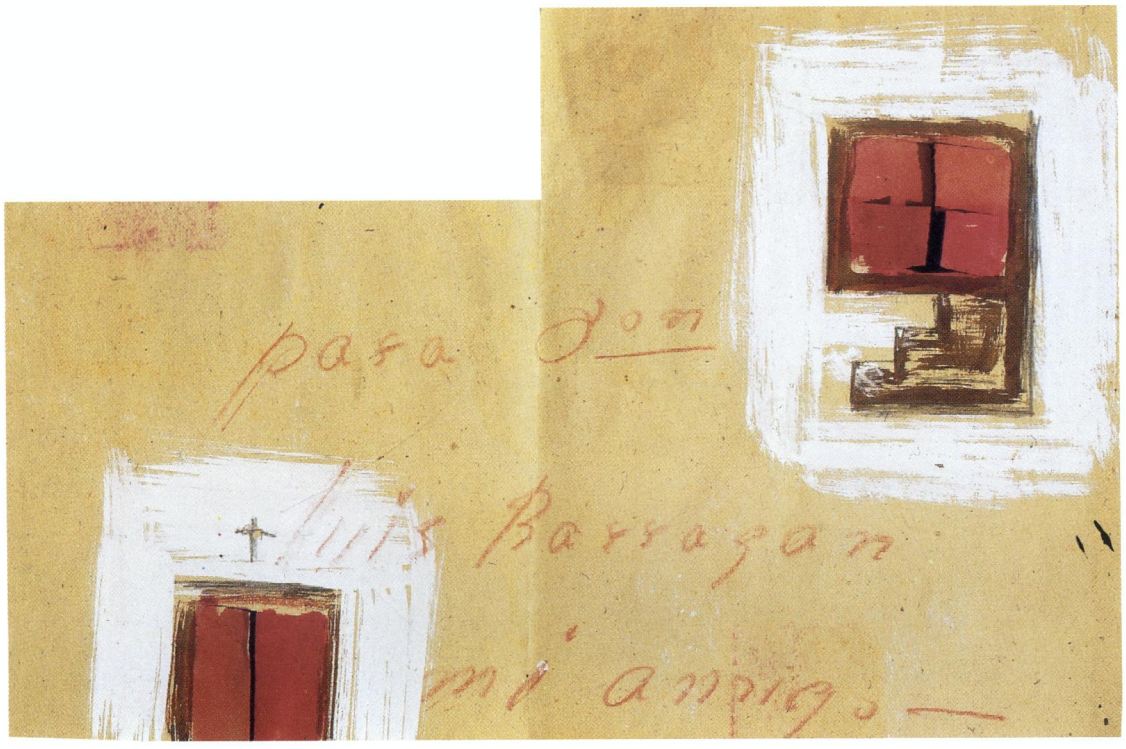
Patio interior. Residencia de Barragán. Dos detalles.

for himself in the fullness of his creative maturity, that Luis Barragán erected a splendid receptacle for the very books which his generous providence now allows us to see, to touch, and to question.

Some of them were well-traveled tomes. Many of the books came from Europe in waves, often in batches of copies to give to friends; others went with him around the world. But when in 1931 he embarked on a second pilgrimage across the Atlantic in search of questions for the answers he already had, in search of names for the things he loved and wished to communicate, his books stayed behind in Guadalajara, at 63 Hospicio Street, in the care of his old and close friend, Juan Palomar y Arias. Barragán's consistent attachment to his native city is another paradox given his cosmopolitan personality and the fact that most of his mature work was carried out in Mexico City.

Ignacio Díaz Morales—perhaps the closest of many fellow wanderers along the paths of art—was the legatee of these books and he established the Jalisco Architecture Foundation, which is presently the official holder of the bibliographic ensemble. For all those interested in the life and work of Luis Barragán, the volumes of his collection are like so many footprints on a journey and represent a unique testimony. They are a series of paper characters, sensitive presences that may have been the most immediate companions of a solitary man whose affections were intense and volatile. They fall silent only when we refuse to heed them, when we ignore their quiet voices of ink. Luis Barragán himself made sure to leave us the traces of his long and repeated conversations with interlocutors from every century and from every continent.

The succession of black lines seems to cry out at times in an anguish of passion and doubt, goaded by the green, red, yellow or pink of the pencils Barragán used to underline, annotate or comment in his books; these same colors, plus



the blue of a pencil or pen, might kindle in a minor key the murmurs of nostalgia and melancholy, or the smile of irony and remembrance.

Some books are heavily marked with the signs of a dialogue, a revealing sustained interchange, while the uncut pages of others testify to a more silent presence. There are flyleaves on which the owner jotted down the page numbers where certain lines aroused distant sensations or where he recognized himself written through the author's pen. A word or phrase in his own hand explains the underlining, the mark in the margin, the downturned corner, the clip or pin: whether an idea or an issue, the name of a concern or a hope.

The insistence on particular themes and references allows us to deduce some keys into the concerns that remained constant throughout his life, and that biographers and architects can no doubt trace in his works. The beautiful features of the many tomes—their fine bindings that reward the touch, their heavy paper manufactured in the old style, their artistic plates and delicate illustrations—say much about Luis Barragán's relationship to his books. The printed word was certainly the vehicle of introspection and silent dialogue, but its corporeity cannot merely be reduced to an instrumental function. Books were not simply transparent witnesses; they were material objects with their own textures and boundaries, realities as luminous as the nuances of human skin.

The presence of many superior editions as well as individual collector's pieces (a Palladio from 1570, a *Chant des morts* illustrated by Picasso and signed by both the Spanish artist and by Reverdy, texts accompanied by original Matisse or Tamayo lithographs) must not mislead us into thinking that he was primarily a collector; there are no series, nor are themes followed through in an exhaustive fashion. There are only individual volumes, chosen for their particularity or their thematic inscriptions.

Other clues relevant to both the artist's life and work are the dedications. Some are prestigious (Louis Kahn, David Hockney), some are the source of honor for Barragán (Ferdinand Bac) and some are full of warm complicity, such as those by Edmundo O'Gorman, Justino Fernández, Díaz Morales—who signed an *Annunciation* by Claudel as "Pierre de Craon"—or José Arriola Adame who inscribed a book with a painful and cryptic epigraph. Others again are amusing and affectionate, like the one by Serge, the circus artiste and brilliant illustrator, a friend from his Paris days. Some dedications are full of a vehement bitter passion and there are others gushing with the admiration of colleagues and disciples.

As we have seen, Luis Barragán was not a systematic collector. Nor did he hoard the books he collected. The generosity that led him to acquire several copies of a book in order to give some to his friends also led him to be profligate with his own shelves. Many accounts confirm that the library was constantly purged, which seems likely if we consider how little material here seems out of tune with the whole. In the course of a lifetime's reading, all libraries tend to become encumbered with official gifts, mistaken acquisitions, books read only once or perhaps left unfinished, books that depart much as they arrived without leaving any great impression. The homogeneity of this collection suggests a decanted ensemble in which the indispensable companions since youth were kept, enriched with significant works belonging to certain thematic directions that were to gradually define themselves over time. The patterns of research that so enriched the whole appear to have tailed off little by little and were almost completely extinguished a few years before Barragán's death. Indeed, there seem to be almost no books dating from the end of his life, apart from a few painfully revealing items such as health manuals or a *Thomas A'Kempis For the Sick*. From these years too, dates the correspondence that records his negotiations via his agents in the United States for the sale of some of his most valuable art books, which were thus lost to the library.

An active reader, Luis Barragán was not only given to annotation and underlining; he also crossed out and—though this was rare—tore off whole pages, incensed at statements he found absurd or blasphemous. An example is *The Unquiet Grave*, one of his bedside books. Its many approving marks reveal an overall empathy and an enthusiastic adherence to most of its ideas; where a cultural Anglicanism surfaces, however, as primary anti-Jesuitism, Barragán responds by erasing a paragraph and adding a

censorious comment. He also used to load certain books with inserts cut out from magazines or newspapers which he slipped between the pages to the considerable detriment of some magnificent volumes. This is evidence of a living relationship with books, detracting still further from the bibliophile character of this library. These inserts indicate his preoccupation with certain themes and help point the way to the exploration of topics that were of outstanding importance to Barragán.

The clippings record the precise configuration of Barragán's interest in this or that issue, focusing on the specific aspects that concerned him. Moreover, our inquiry benefits not only from the reliable evidence constituted by commentaries, marks and inserts, and the silent pages of uncut and unopened books. The relevance of many works can also be gleaned by cross-reference with Barragán's statements, testimonies, and other examples showing his affinity for topics as incontrovertible proof of his interest.

Let us return, then, to that French grammar in the library of a Mexican who never mastered English because, as he was known to say, "In New York all the girls speak French." In early twentieth-century Mexico, the chief idiom of culture was French. It was a window on the world as well as the foreign language taught in school. Many of Barragán's literary tastes reflect a generation whose artistic signposts pointed to Paris. The small number of Anglophone essayists and novelists in the library (Connolly, Huxley) he read in Spanish translation. Furthermore, in the case of Poe, the American author was highly venerated and analyzed by one of Barragán's favorite poets, Baudelaire. This is not an exceptional case. France, as we shall see further on, provided a bridge for Barragán to the most far-flung horizons of Africa and the Mediterranean.

However, the library does contain a number of other books in English. Most of these are sophisticated publications about architecture, geography or travel; they are usually free of notes and underlinings, though they often contain inserts. They were appreciated probably for their graphic rather than their textual value.

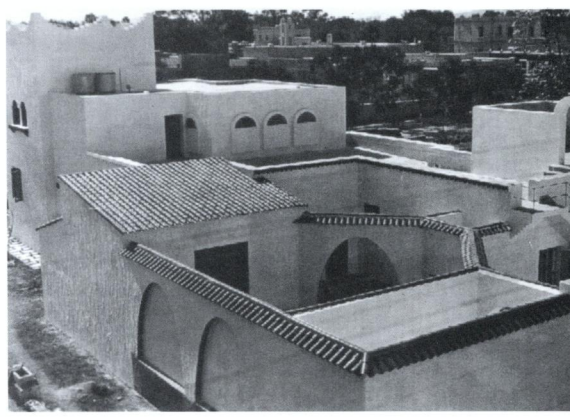
The second type of books corresponds to a significant section of this library. It is a separate collection that arrived all at once yet has nothing intrusive about it, a collection that found a natural home among Barragán's books since it echoed one of his foremost inner voices, one that these volumes may have helped him to recognize and to express. I am referring to the personal library of Miguel Covarrubias. This singular man was an Oceanic anthropologist and an illustrator in New York, who died before the age of fifty-four. Covarrubias was a cherished friend of Barragán's and should be included among his essential influences, on a par with Jesús Reyes Ferreira.

All these books sprung from different horizons but they have commingled to form a single family, united around the dreams of one man. They are all present in his works: some in express, identifiable forms such as a step or an arch; others in a vibration, an intangible breath. Their owner's genius consisted in bringing them together and converting the stacks of printed lines (about imagined characters, religion, Melanesian ethnography, or botany) into forms, walls and light.

Luis Barragán's books have found a dwelling worthy of their stature. The present library was once part of the home of Andrés Casillas, a faithful disciple, who himself built the house. Now the volumes are beginning a third life. The first was on the neutral shelves of bookshops, before Luis Barragán or one of his friends had rescued them. A second life took shape under their owner's eye, and close to his hand. Today, their existence is devoted to the nourishment and stimulation of the passionate fondness held by Barragán scholars from Europe, Asia and America.

An endless stone staircase in the form of a helix, whose yellow spine does not adulterate the shadowy nature of the space (a stair fit for a keep or a belltower) affords us a break from the strident luminosity of Barragán's native city. It is a liminary space, an initiatory ascent prolonged beyond the last level. Once we have reached this level we encounter first a wall, then a vestibule, then another wall coated in gold like a baroque altarpiece and finally the sober, muted sanctuary laid out in broken circles. The dwelling of these books is open only to the sky, to the eucalyptus trees, to the changes of the light and the teasing of the wind. It enjoys, too, the ultimate luxury, a jewel as excessive as the golden surface of the wall: five weeks of blue, of a jacaranda blossoming in Guadalajara.

Luis Barragán's library is not composed of the technical literature that such a specialist requires for his profession. It is rather—to use a phrase of which he would surely approve—the library of an *hônnete homme*. This term was much in vogue during the seventeenth century and it was used to denote one of those steady hearts, those *têtes bien faites* displayed by men of solid, ample and well-digested culture: lords of intelligence and feeling, to whom nothing that is human can be a matter of indifference. Compared to other categories, books on archi-



Hacienda de Jalisco. Foto tomada por Luis Barragán en los treinta.

Casa Gustavo R. Cristo. Zaragoza 307, Chapala, Jalisco. 1931.

Página anterior: Jesús Reyes Ferreira. *Fachada*, s.f. Mixta/papel. 33 x 48 cm. Colección Luis Barragán.

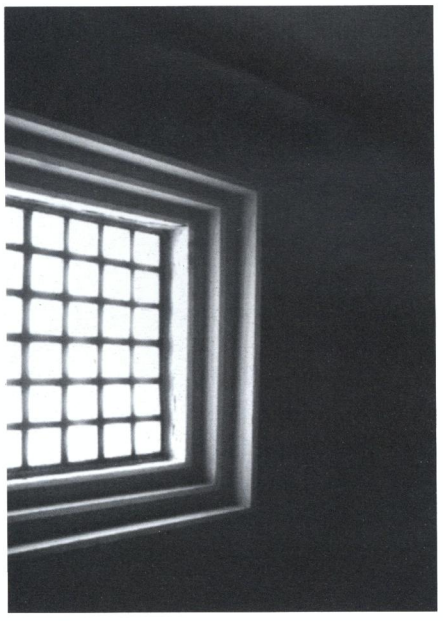
tecture find themselves in a minority (a brilliant, numerous and eclectic minority) which thanks to the archaeological efforts of the Jalisco Architecture Foundation, are arranged in as accurate an order as possible in the Tacubaya house. An order that corresponded to the haphazards of a living library whose accessible size could be managed from memory without the need of a catalogue.

Words and Phantoms

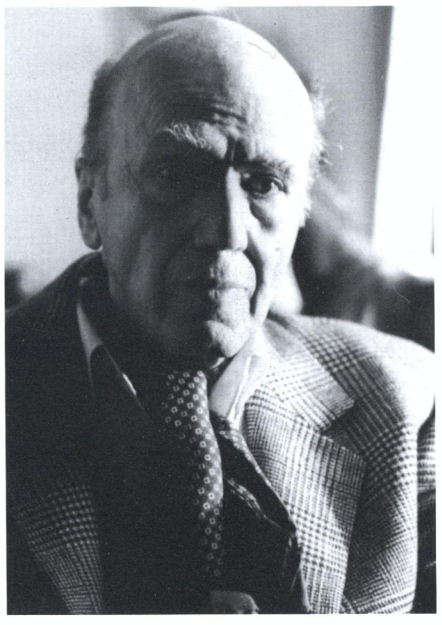
Lovers weep over what they haven't lost, for what they might have had was never theirs.
Edmundo O'Gorman

When Álvaro Mutis visited the library, he immediately noticed two imposing ingredients: Ramón del Valle Inclán and Marcel Proust. The first in parchment bindings almost fills an entire shelf; the works of Proust and on all aspects of his *oeuvre* are found on almost every shelf. Valle Inclán's novels and plays have each been read, though they bear very little annotation, and there are no critical studies or biographies pertaining to him (that is, no *ramonismo*). As for Proust, on the contrary, not only the dispersal but also the proliferation of *marcelliana* is remarkable. Several memoirs recall that André Maurois' biography of Proust was the last open book seen at Barragán's bedside. This and other works on the author are among the most commented and underlined of the books, providing important data to which we shall later return. In the context of Proust, both presences and absences convey a notion of Barragán's literary affinities. It is certainly not Proust the ethnographer, or the constructor of plots, that interested him (not a single copy of Zola or of Eugène Sue); the only Balzac that has been read here is *La peau de chagrin*, underlined in relation to completely different topics. Nor is Proust valued as a classic, a necessary inclusion in a series of prestigious names; there is practically nothing from the *grand siècle* or from the Enlightenment: neither Racine, Corneille, Molière or Voltaire. Bossuet does appear, but for other reasons, as we shall see. Nor do we find evidence of any systematic concern. Though there is a *Montaigne* by Lanson, his *Histoire de la littérature française* (considered indispensable in those days) is conspicuously absent.

Proustolatry has its limits: surprising lacunae include Saint-Simon and Madame de Sévigné, not to mention Ruskin. How is it possible that Proust's *oeuvre* and Marcel's life aroused such an intense yet incomplete interest? Perhaps the other volumes can enlighten us.



Casa habitación. Pedro Loza 517, Guadalajara, Jalisco. 1928.



Luis Barragán.

If we examine Barragán's relationship to French prose, we find that apart from the many volumes that most readers of his time would have owned (from Verhaeren to Pierre Louÿs), there are two main lines of descent in the authors most favored by him: one axis formed by Mauriac and Claudel, the other by Flaubert and Stendhal. The first amounts to obligatory reading for any Catholic Francophile of that generation: a copy of Claudel's *Annunciation* which was a gift from Efraín González Luna. There is also another luxuriously artistic edition of the same work. The problems of redemption and grace, of divine mercy and forgiveness, as well as the frailties of the sinful human condition in the light of supernatural destiny—like the mysterious, winding path of the affections—constitute some of the areas in which these authors counselled Barragán. Such literature does not appear to have attracted him for its stylistic or formal qualities. His penchant for well-honed and concise forms of expression (with a clear metaphysical, ethical or psychological content) perhaps emerges through these books, as well as throughout the library. In addition to being great writers, both Mauriac and Claudel were Catholic; they represented an exceptional generation of men of letters who stood up for their confessional identity in a world that was becoming increasingly secularized. In Mexico, too, several talented artists of Barragán's generation (including Efraín González Luna and Antonio Gómez Robledo) adopted a similar stance.

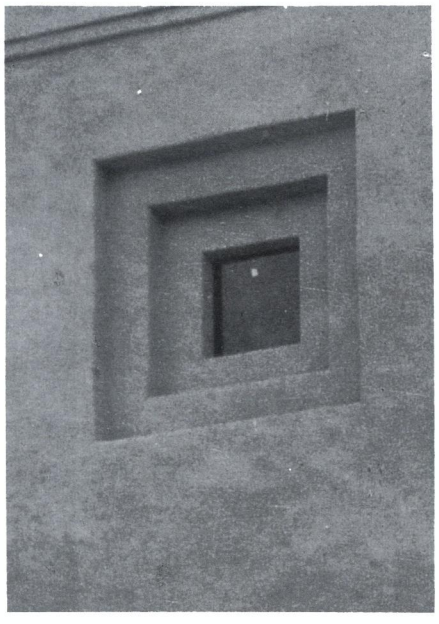
The other two authors we have mentioned belong to a completely different strand more akin to Proust. Flaubert and Stendhal are taxonomists of both the sentiments and passions. Their outlook is circumscribed to the horizons of human time. Whatever transcendental dimensions they attain, it is only by dint of their commitment to writing, to the conquest of language. This is what Barragán appears to have sought in their works. Judging by the marginal annotations, it was not the art of description nor the genius of narrative structure that seduced him, so much as their analytic dissection of the morass of free will and desire. These authors, though they were hardly recommended reading for young Catholics of the time, will always be vital teachers for any person of culture. Their presence in his library testifies to the scope of Luis Barragán's intellectual hunger and his capacity for venturing outside the tutelary bounds of his ideological universe. The absence of Gide is therefore remarkable, for here is a writer who would have been utterly congruent with both facets; perhaps there was something distasteful to Barragán in Gide's Calvinist worldview or in

his dry prose; perhaps it was simply a case of two trajectories that never came together.

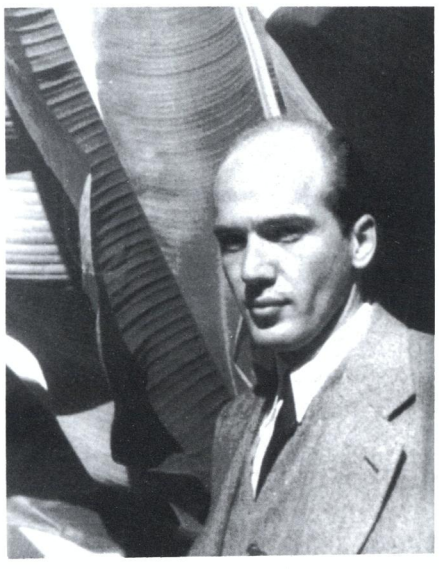
As a lover of adventure and perhaps something of a wanderer, Luis Barragán appears to have let himself be guided by the acuteness of his intelligence. Outside the linguistic territories with which he was familiar, other narrative genres are represented in translation: Dostoyevsky and Tolstoy in Spanish, Poe and Durrell in both Spanish and French. Though these binary configurations may appear peculiar, they are symptomatic of the structure of his literary collection. The omission of Dostoyevsky or Tolstoy would have been unthinkable for a cultivated man, a reader of novels who was simultaneously concerned with the labyrinths of sensibility and the chasms of the human condition. However, it is quite surprising to note the relative poverty of his Anglo-Saxon reading, and this can only be explained by his almost exclusive orientation toward French culture.

Poe is, as we have said, an inevitable name for any lover of Baudelaire such as Barragán. Durrell's *Alexandria Quartet*, however, paved its own road into our reader's affections. Perhaps the Alexandrian setting had something to do with it, but more important was what we find stressed in the underlinings and annotations. In this work, as in all those we have mentioned so far (even Balzac or Bossuet, whose *Treaty of Concupiscence* is the pretext for his inclusion here), the marked passages evoke human beings who are fragile and bemused in the face of erotic passion, swept away by delight or despair into the vortex of desire or overcome by anguish or resignation under the onslaught of the complexities of love. The only annotated volume of *Remembrance of Things Past* contains an insert, placed there so long ago that it has stained the page: a crime report cut out from a newspaper. This hoary clipping relates the story of a jealous husband who attempts to catch his wife *in fraganti*. This banal incident is conjugal tragicomedy of the lowest kind, stock vaudeville material (the husband breaks into the wrong house). But it is slipped between the pages of a novel that elevated the art of jealousy to the status of top-drawer voluptuousness, written by a master analyst of the infinitely intricate tortures that the longing for possession or the uncertainty of the other's affections can wreak upon individuals eager for hellfire before their time.

We have dwelt at such length upon this minor detail, trivial in itself, only because it exemplifies a theme which is hammered home again and again. The inconstancy of feeling and the desolation of abandonment emerge as a major preoccupation for this imaginary reader whom we have been stalking with the aid of tiny clues and opaque glimmerings, and who may well have little in common with any of the men known as Luis Barragán. But perhaps we are on the right track.



Casa Efraín González Luna.



Luis Barragán.

In an account kept among the documents of an archive in which the Foundation has carefully stored all the Barraganalia known to date (this archive promises to be invaluable for biographers and researchers), Andrés Casillas relates that "Barragán used to work ten or a hundred times harder than any normal architect. He would only take on one project at a time. He could not cope with more for he poured his whole self into each work. He used to say that he built the Pedregal project, I think it was, in order to forget about a girlfriend who was tormenting him beyond endurance. 'I have got to work at something, because I can't stand thinking about her all the time.' And he threw himself into designing the Pedregal."

The character who emerges from this anecdote as described by someone who was exceptionally close to him, helps us perhaps to grasp one of the essential traits of a life in which tendencies, essentially antagonistic, were fused. Only an extraordinary energy and dedication to work can account for the monumental achievements of this life. According to Casillas' story, Barragán's rhythm was an intermittent one in which the ascetic alternated with the licentious, the feverish with the placid, the worldly with the reclusive. The unusual vigor of his artistic creation was no doubt fed at times by live currents of subterranean lava. Perhaps Luis Barragán's genius was that of a man who was able to translate inner peace into volcanic forms, commute unhappiness into angles and shadows, and pain into paint.

Paris

...jamais peut-être
Ô toi que j'eusse aimée...
Baudelaire

The library is dominated by a tutelary phantom who is at the same time the liveliest of all the authors here. The importance of this writer is something about which Barragán scholars all agree. Strictly speaking, he should have been mentioned from the outset: I am referring, of course, to Ferdinand Bac. The fundamental influence of one of his many works, *Les Colombières*, on Luis Barragán's artistic evolution has been well documented. The only literary tribute ever expressly made by Barragán himself

was to this very work. The reverence and fascination aroused by the French landscape artist and prolific author in the Mexican architect has been passed down to the many students and admirers of his buildings and persona. (The Jalisco College of Architecture, in an unprecedented and commendable move, has edited a facsimile edition of both *Les Colombières* and *Les jardins enchantés.*) Ferdinand Bac's life and work merit a special place in any biographical treatment of Barragán. The two artists had much in common, despite the obvious differences between a bastard offshoot of the Bonaparte dynasty and a landowner from the highlands of Jalisco who was forty-three years younger.

In 1925 Luis Barragán arrived in Paris, a journey that must have begun with the crossing of Lake Chapala en route to Guadalajara where he boarded a train to Mexico City and there another to Veracruz. In describing one of these lake crossings, Juan Palomar Verea has epitomized the geographical, social and esthetic position of Barragán, together with the rhythm of his times.

Nineteen twenty-five is a year with a difference, a year that made its mark on art history. There is something called the "1925 look" connected to the Universal Exhibition in Paris, the first of its kind after the great nineteenth-century imperial exhibitions, and also, perhaps, the last of a century that was reluctant to die. At this world's fair certain things were seen for almost the last time, such as unique pieces of furniture or objects produced in very limited series, made from materials of the utmost quality, designed in keeping with the most daring esthetic imperatives of the day—in the tradition, say, of the eighteenth-century *ornemantistes.* It was a moment when there was as yet no contradiction between criteria that now seem mutually exclusive: concerns of functionality and formal economy (Gropius) and a love for opulent materials and meticulous craftsmanship (Ruhlman) both subject to the intransigent rigors of style.

Let us imagine this twenty-three year old youth, fresh out of the Mazamitla hills, about to be plunged into the whirlpool which saw the death of Art Nouveau and the rise of so many paradoxical reflections, all of them nameless, not yet petrified. The great movements which had begun with the century were still healthy, active and in constant flux. According to Ignacio Díaz Morales, much perplexity had been caused in faraway Guadalajara by the muffled echoes of this artistic upheaval. Upon arrival in Paris, Luis Barragán experienced, as he has said himself, an overwhelming negative reaction. There was nothing in this marvelous chaos with which he could identify, nothing that resembled his esthetic universe—with its stony roads, its bird-filled squares, its ample houses and interlocking courtyards, its convivial urban scale, its silences between stream and sky. Nothing, and yet... One day he came across the modest work of a minor artist who was better known as a man about town than as a stylistic innovator; a man whose work fitted none of the current vanguards, whose ethos had frankly more in common with the climate of the Second Empire. Its effect on the young man was not an interest so much as a genuine fascination. Barragán found no rest until he finally met the artist several years later.

It was his second great fascination. Barragán, as a *criollo,* had found in Spain a sublime embodiment of the esthetic ideals of his time and his background (for a traditional and formal Hispanism was an obligatory reference, though not always an explicit one, for the *criollo* of his day and before). This was the Generalife, the garden par excellence, the possible paradise on earth for Spaniards of all three faiths; a precedent, or rather a yearning that had spread to all the lands which spoke the tongue of Cide Hamete Benengeli, author of *El Quijote.* This was surely the first affinity that Barragán found in Bac: a common vocabulary, a shared reference. For Bac was not only a landscape artist and architect. There were two tomes by him on Barragán's bedside table (a third, which we shall discuss later, lay on the shelves): *Les Colombières* and *Les jardins enchantés.* This is especially interesting when we consider that Bac published dozens of works. The second book has received less attention than *Les Colombières,* and owing to its illustrations, is commonly dismissed as just another book on architecture by Ferdinand Bac.

It is, however, a literary offering, beautifully illustrated by the author and bound in a quality edition. The story amounts to a pleasant *espagnolade* in an atmosphere not unlike the facile exoticism of Mérimée and Bizet.

Spain, in this version, is not unlike Pierre Loti's Turkey: "a universe of magic and mystery." The text might almost be a transposition of Azyade onto Andalusian soil. Space is a leading protagonist here as a woman is glimpsed, becomes ardently desired, approaches only to vanish once again, seems to relent and suddenly flees, evaporating among the shadows and angles of a territory that is full of surprises: vegetal geography, an "enchanted garden."

The garden is more than a setting. It is the main character through which the other two (the panting, frustrated lover and the sweet, elu-

sive woman) are delivered to their destiny, a destiny which will never allow them to meet.

This delicious, agonized destiny is the garden's reason for existence, as a partner in every pleasure and a witness of each despair, as the only concrete reality, the only sense to be made of so much waiting and wandering. Woman as promise, the inaccessible woman: she is the same throughout Barragán's reading.

Let us once more imagine the young artist, seeking not so much the technical instruments with which to advance a professional career, but in search of an esthetic and spiritual experience: a vocation. Plunged into the disconcerting chaos of Paris in 1925, he is seduced by a single work, a minor one, a work that corresponds to his deepest, most inaccessible concerns, still blurred and unknown. It is a work that would serve as the fissure through which he entered the vastness of the changing world.

It is probably erroneous to dissociate the literary Bac from Bac the landscapist, in relation to Barragán's education. Ferdinand Bac offered him much more than a model garden or an approach to building. Thanks to his work, Barragán was able to find a way of linking creation with the pulse of the soul, a way of making the concern with form provide fundamental answers to life. This is why Ferdinand Bac—literary man and architect, dandy and draughtsman—represents far more than an influence. Luis Barragán did not hesitate to grant him the status of master.

For Barragán, a man whose talents and sensibilities were visual rather than verbal, Bac opened up a fascinating path: to create spaces that were as close as possible to those ideal enclosures which might provoke encounters and misencounters, the living agents of a literary trajectory. From that moment on, through all the stages of his stylistic evolution and the ripening of his talent and genius, he never ceased to attempt the construction of territories suited to the experience of the quest—for the inaccessible woman or for an absolute that was even closer and more elusive than she.

Orients and Mediterraneans

…she heard the wind between the rocks, felt the dryness of the air on her lips, and let her eyes accompany the birds in their indecisive flight.

Alberto Ruy-Sánchez

The forms of Spain (the Alhambra) and the language and literary culture of France had led the Mexican architect to Bac, the only sign he was able to decipher at first in the stylistic onslaught of Paris in the twenties. His affinities with this esthetic environment were soon manifest, however, even despite his initial repudiation. Barragán became an admirer of Picasso, of the fauvist palette, of the musical and plastic perspectives opened by the Russian ballet, of Japanese art: all trends which had originated in earlier decades and still powerfully affected the art of the time. First Spain, then France, were to introduce him to other universes that would prove to be equally significant for his own art: the Mediterranean, the Arab countries, and later, distant black Africa.

Thus it was thanks to Ferdinand Bac that Barragán found a word which gave authority and legitimacy to everything he had learned to love in Mazamitla: the haunting haciendas and monasteries for the sake of their vast, contemplative spaces, their elemental textures, pure lines, and massive volumes—all the things he would assiduously cultivate in later years. Barragán christened all these elements "the Mediterranean." Having returned from Paris—a city which in those days could justify anything—this term helped Barragán and his friends discover a route through the confusion reigning in Mexico. It meant the end of an outrageous francophilia and the challenges of a new architecture, a regional art which responded to the new demands of a nationalist ideology. He was never to dabble in Mexican indigenism. The French experience moreover enabled him to surmount the restrictive horizons of an elitist Hispanism. (The sobering counter-example of the "Californian colonial" style may also have been relevant.)

It was the French who had coined, two generations before, the term "Latin America." This term served their attempt to expand and include themselves within the Iberoamerican ambit, fracturing the Spanish/Indian paradigm into which history had locked these nations by introducing a crucial variation at one of its poles. Our Spanish lineage seemed the place to implant an ideal Latinism that Napoleon III had aspired to lead. The term Mediterranean, on the other hand, broadened the framework of Mexico's symbolic paradigms. By qualifying certain features of Mexican traditional architecture as Mediterranean, the narrow ethnic dichotomy in which the country had been confined was broken forever and the roots of its founding trees were lengthened to reach Tangiers, Venice, Istanbul and Alexandria.

From this point of view, Luis Barragán's work is a fundamental leap in the evolution of the esthetic stereotypes that mean so much for

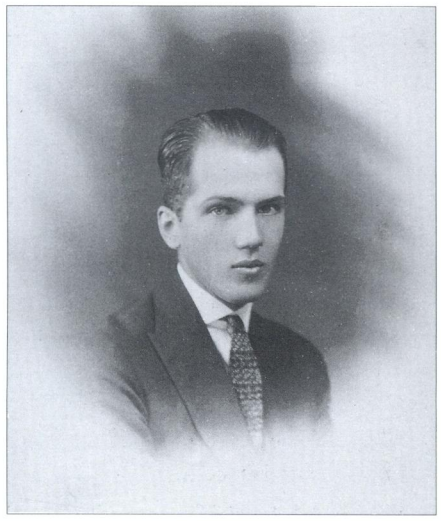
Fuente del fraccionamiento Los Clubes, Estado de México. Detalle: "Los amantes".

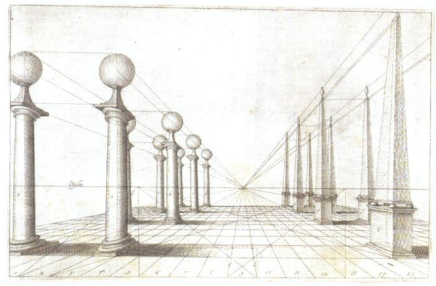
the construction of social identities. Thanks to him, our compatriots discovered that many of the traits they had thought of as plain "ranchero" were actually "Mediterranean" and no more typically Mexican than they were typically Turkish, Greek or Tunisian. This has had consequent effects for those who understand identity in the light of a social genealogy which is more complex and less exclusive than had been previously supposed. If what is ours is the domain of many, why call it ours? Why squander a possessive pronoun? The final consequences of such an esthetic project, which is also a political agenda, imply the broadening of this great "we" to the point at which its inclusiveness must liquidate the last connotations of xenophobia.

Vanishing women, captivating figures who melt away at a touch, the exaltation of sentiments and senses, intense hours that resolve into wistfulness: Luis Barragán's library contains a choice selection of the Persian, Arabic and North African literature of love.

Here too, we can establish a continuity between this universe and Barragán's native environment. In the first place, of course, there is the Andalusian bridge between Mexico and Islam marked by the presence of a *Romancéro moresque* published in Paris. Then we have the Orientalist volumes, estheticized French fantasies born of the fascination with an immediate yet distinct continent, so different that it appears distant.

French Orientalism is reflected in this collection with some superb editions published between 1920 and 1930 (complete with friezes, vignettes and Moroccan calfskin bindings), and goes so far as to include an exquisite Berber poem illustrated with Tifinagh characters. And thus we slip along the southern edge of the Mediterranean, first through the Arab world, then to Persia reaching Teheran and Ispahan with Omar Khayyam, Hafiz, and miniatures introduced by Paul Morand. Here concludes Barragán's Islamic tour; Mogul, Ottoman, Indonesian and African cultures are invoked through certain visual or ethnological objects of a very different kind. We should not be misled by the presence of these literary masterpieces from Arabia, Persia or the desert. They do not indicate any genuine Islamophilia or methodical, rigorous Orientalism; they do not even represent a consistent interest in such literature. *The Arabian Nights*, that jewel of interwoven stories that is the delight of any reader interested in narrative construction, are found in an ordinary and cruelly abridged edition. None of the great translations of this century found their way into his library, nor any of the critical works (Miquel, Bencheikh, Hawam).





Luis Barragán.

Lámina 1 del libro *Perspective,* de Jean Vredeman.

Paráfrasis hecha por Dalí de esa imagen de Vredeman: Barragán la recortó y pegó en el libro original.

Still, this fine Orientalist collection confirms our notion that Barragán's literary interest revolved around the theme of love. We find no essays, nor works of literary history or criticism in this terrain. Even more surprising is the lack of any single volume on Islamic mysticism, in a man who was deeply immersed in religious issues, who consulted many Christian authors (including Saint John of the Cross) and whose thinking was closely related to Semitic mystical tendencies.

The political and cultural history of the region is also ignored, with the exception of a biography of Marshall Lyautey stuffed with inserts. In a letter posted from New York to Rafael Urzúa—a companion, like Ignacio Díaz Morales, from what was to become the Jalisco School of Architecture—Barragán urges his friend to visit the "oriental Mediterranean." The Islamic world was only one component of the territory to which Barragán could lay claim through Andalusia. His fancy did not turn only to literature, of course. Books on the geography, anthropology and architecture of the region abound.

Let us digress for a moment into the epithet "Mediterranean" that is commonly applied to some of his styles. There is no doubt that the early Barragán, during his Guadalajara years,

reveals a marked debt to French colonial architecture especially to the so-called Casablanca School. His buildings of the period would not have looked out of place among the Tunisian streets illustrated in one of his books. Explicit echoes of that era include arches, wings, or the ziggurat towers of the Casa de Cristo that would later disappear.

The autonomous suburban garden, separate from the residence, which can be seen in some Florentine villas and in many Mexican country homes (and cultivated by Luis Barragán in Mexico City) is another characteristic of a tradition that reveres water and greenery above all else that is visible, going so far as to make green the color of the faith. Entrances that are broken, initiatory and labyrinthine are common in a civilization that often segregates public (or masculine) space from the domestic realm of women. Seen from the city, the house is a sculptural mass of unbroken walls. The jalousie, no longer used in Mexico and to which Barragán resorts as a means of directing light toward private spaces (using a Japanese technique) is called *moucharabieh* in the Arab world. It is a discreet balcony permitting women to be invisibly present in the urban world outside, not a mere filter for light but also a slit through which the imprisoned gaze may escape. The Arab jalousie (now extinct in Mexico but still found in certain Peruvian palaces) invites women into the activity of the street, an important part of family life. Nothing could be more alien to Barragán's organization of space. Likewise, the roof terrace in the Arab world is a cool area that opens onto the firmament, as in Barragán's house in Tacubaya; but it is also a communicative link with the neighbors (who form an indispensable part of everyday life) and a summer dormitory.

In all its various stages, Barragán's work reveals a greater kinship with rural or isolated Islamic dwellings than with the urban or village residence, for the latter are constrained by an extremely dense network of human interaction. These homes would be inconceivable without the presence of a neighborhood, cities in which streets may be rare but alleys and little squares proliferate as arteries to be experienced on foot in immediate tactile and olfactory contact with one's fellows, reducing individual autonomy to a minimum. Life is devoted to collective events and the communal expression of religion.

It is perhaps in the realm of ornamentation where these differences stand out most clearly. Barragán eschews fretwork, scallops, paintings and tiles. His walls and ceilings are free of calligraphic flourishes, shiny enamelled surfaces and opulent or dazzling materials except for the multicolored spheres or the gold leaf on the retable-styled walls. He does not indulge in curved effects in florid arabesques to tempt the senses with the pursuit of delight and the soul with the pursuit of God, as the Sufis would have it.

On the Islamic side of the Mediterranean, then, Luis Barragán only rediscovered what had acclimatized itself to his own lands from ancient times.

It seems, therefore, that while Barragán's houses may have a tenuous relationship with some Mediterranean homes, his urbanism (always implicit, in that he produced very few complexes, parks or housing estates) is utterly divorced from the Islamic tradition in which public space is predominantly masculine, and the individual is subsumed into the community. We have already noted one lonely example among his books of the biographical genre (the history books do not form a continuous thread): the life of Marshall Lyautey. The powerful personality of this official, who had represented the French government during the Protectorate—when Barragán toured the Maghreb—seemed to induce him to keep this book and increase it with a wealth of inserts. However, he does not seem to have understood the immense importance that this eminent soldier had for architecture, as a passionate connoisseur of the western Muslim lands. (The epitaph on his grave in Les Invalides is carved in both French and Arabic.) During Lyautey's term of office, the Sherif monarchy had to face times of rapid modernization. The policy, a conjunction of political and urban imperatives, was extremely fortunate for architecture. The demolishment or remodelling of streets and blocks was avoided; refurbishment and reparation were preferred, providing a new lease of life for old cities. There was no thought of adapting the medina to the motor car at the cost of sacrificing ancient palaces, religious centers or even housing; no question of gutting neighborhoods to make way for progress. This approach can be summarized as follows: anyone wishing to build "à la moderne," to the taste of the times, should establish entirely new urban settlements that may be coherent and homogeneous in vacant areas on the city edge. Long live old buildings, let palaces and humble shacks be restored and inhabited, let the neighborhoods, popular trades and back alleys breathe again.

These directives, which the monarchy fortunately did not repeal, ensured that the kingdom of Morocco preserved the prodigious city-museums that make it heir to the loftiest architectural traditions of Al-Andalus.

Barragán's architectural quest had led him as far as the Atlas Mountains and the Berbers of Morocco. Yet another trail made him swerve from the Algerian coast and venture south in spirit into Tuareg territory. Here Father Charles de Foucauld—another loner with a thirst for eternity—had sought God in the purity of the dry Saharan air under the absolute sun of these outlandish wastes. He had sought Him in the fraternity of the blue men, the lords of rock and sand. Luis Barragán may have felt profound empathy toward the undertaking of a man who resembled him in so many ways, as is confirmed by the presence of one of his books in the library. But Barragán approached these worlds without relinquishing the thread that linked him to his own origins and his own land, and that

Portada del libro clásico de arquitectura escrito por Andrea Palladio, editado en Venecia, 1570. Juan O'Gorman regaló este ejemplar a Barragán.

Lámina 13 del libro *Perspective*, de Jean Vredeman. Ejemplar perteneciente a la biblioteca personal de Barragán.

permitted him to bring back books, experiences and projects that could be transformed into his own work. His brush with the Mediterranean and the East was very different from that of genuine adventurers such as De Foucauld, T.E. Lawrence or Isabelle Eberhardt—people who virtually shed their old skins and selves, and became somehow dissolved into the landscape they had chosen.

Faced with the East and the Mediterranean, Luis Barragán was a lucid traveler who discovered, recognized, and admired. He was never the bewitched lover, prepared to turn the encounter into a vital new direction.

Peoples, Bodies, Places

Seen this way, the horizon does not exist; it is placed there by the gaze, a thread snapping with each blink of the eye.
Alberto Ruy-Sánchez

The library throws light on a relatively neglected facet of Barragán's personality: Barragán the anthropologist, the intrigued examiner of remote cultures, fascinated by the art of tribal societies; the man for whom Black Africa meant more than a passing fancy. We have already mentioned the capital importance for this library, and for Barragán's esthetic and personal development, of his friendship with Miguel Covarrubias: a relationship that was no less seminal than the ones he enjoyed with Bac or with Reyes Ferreira. When Covarrubias died, Barragán, as his executor, inherited many items from his personal library (as well as a significant collection of artworks). Several letters testify to the role played by Luis Barragán in the posthumous publication of works by Covarrubias.

Thus several volumes of Pacific, African and Mexican ethnography are to be found here, either written by Miguel Covarrubias or illustrated by him. The picture books are not exclusively of ethnographic interest; New York's café society was likely the preferred stamping ground of this extraordinary cartoonist, a frequent contributor to *Vanity Fair*.

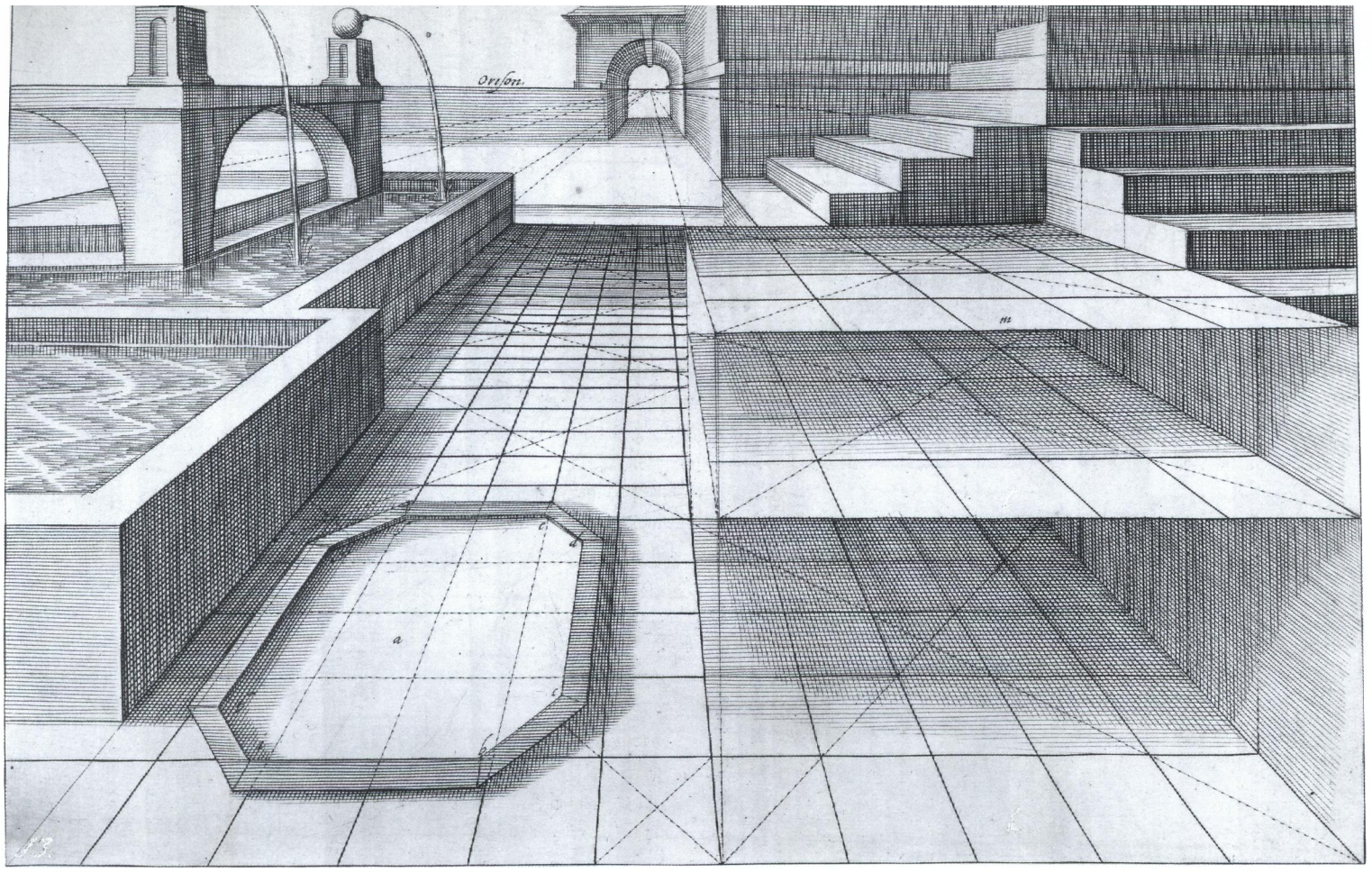
Nor does all the ethnography in the library derive from the Covarrubias stock. Barragán's interest in Mediterranean architecture had led him to observe the Maghrebian habitat with particular attention, and this included not only the houses, the *ryadh* and towns, but also the people who lent life to these constructions and spaces. We had left Luis Barragán in Tamanrasset, the last outpost of the Mediterranean world. His interest in Islamic, and especially North African, art and architecture had enriched the library with many books about imperial cities, fortified villas, and villages. He was not concerned only with buildings. There are a large number of photographic books celebrating the mountains, valleys and oases of the region, as well as some, though these are fewer, describing everyday life among the people. Books about the migrant Bedouin caravans made Luis Barragán cross the Sahara, bringing him face to face with a new frontier: Black Africa, one of the most important territories for his personal sensibility though it is scarcely visible in his work. We know this thanks to the plentiful works of African art decorating his living quarters, as well as from its presence among his books and in the testimony of friends (Gilardi).

This region is covered by books about architecture, geography, and local life. It is a large collection, nourished by newspaper or magazine clippings on the Nuer, the Masai, the Nuba or the Dogon peoples.

Once more it must be pointed out that this is by no means a systematic attitude. None of the great works of Anglo-Saxon ethnography are present, and most of the French texts, apart from one by Michel Leiris, are no more than interesting monographs of limited scope (there are, however, certain worthwhile ethnographic accounts of African dwellings). There are even some tomes that fall into facile exoticism. Nevertheless, despite this unevenness of quality, certain constants can be perceived. One is, of course, the interest in the living dimension of dwelling-places; the everyday manner of habitation, the ethnography of the home and of patterns of residence. Ritual activities, beliefs, and founding narratives all constitute a steady preoccupation, along with plastic achievements and corporal modes of expression including dance, play, or adornment and make-up.

Two strands predominate in Barragán's sensibility: on the one hand an interest in the symbolic world, with its transcendent dimension, and on the other a fascination with the sensual life, with the materiality of human existence. These attitudes entail a lesser degree of interest in the domains lying between the two poles, the ground, in fact, that is currently of most interest to academic anthropology: matters concerning power, society, or economics.

Another part of the world that seems to have attracted him with equal force is the South Pacific, especially Polynesia and New Guinea. From Tahiti we find a lovely facsimile edition of a small ethnographic text written, illustrated and translated from Maori into French by Paul Gauguin. As noted above, Covarrubias practiced field-work in Bali; there is a brief but precious



notebook here from this period which contains hand-written jottings, both by Miguel and by his wife Rosa, as well as sketches, drafts for pictures and ethnographic pages.

It was perhaps thanks to Covarrubias that Luis Barragán was able to gain access to a world that was so culturally alien to most Mexicans. Once aroused, this interest never left him. There are late works and magazine clippings that remind us of the compulsion he felt toward this part of the world, especially toward New Guinea, even though primarily ethnographic books give way here to illustrated volumes and inserts.

What did this aperture to such distant territories mean to Barragán, when it was a taste that was certainly unusual among his compatriots? It is intriguing to note that such a passion for non-Western societies failed to extend to the aboriginal natives of pre-Hispanic Mexico, any more than it embraced the indigenous cultures of contemporary Mexico, when compared to the strong interest in American tribes shown by so many Mexicans from Clavijero onwards.

But Luis Barragán was never a man who fell into the facile trap of unearthing his "roots." His love for the elemental in both architectural and human terms, stripped of the artifice that he saw and condemned in his own civilization—which his refined spirit had ample reason to repudiate—never led him to idealize any single image gleaned from past or present, to be converted into some fresh Grail upheld as the repository of every perfection, a revival of which would guarantee a new Golden Age. Salvation did not lie in the reconstruction of lost origins, nor in any authentic particularism, any uniqueness of a people or race. Thus while many Mexican artists of his day were fervently committed to the nationalistic exaltation of bygone Aztec glories, promoting a blend of populist indigenism and international proletarianism, Barragán inclined rather to defend the universality of all cultures. And these included cultures close at hand like the Hispanic-Indian groups, as well as those that were more distant—be they prestigious like China or Greece, or reputedly pure and unspoiled like the so-called primitives.

While some artists devoted entire murals to celebrating their vernacular roots, Luis Barragán brought the same attention to bear upon the indigenous world of Mexico past and present, as he did upon those other peoples removed from the mainstream of the Latin, Hellenic or Judeo-Christian civilization that was the cornerstone of his identity and the source-map of his spiritual landmarks. Such an attitude was fairly typical of his time (it was shared by many European contemporaries, connected to Vlaminck and cubism) and was characterized by a respectful kind of avidity, a high standard of consideration with regard to the arts of non-Western peoples. But it had escaped his notice at first, during that Universal Exhibition in Paris, 1925, and was only to win him over little by little, as he slowly developed into a mature artist. Such a frame of reference is not, of course, restricted to a mere gamut of formal inspirations; it implies a genuine esthetic and, indeed, ethical orientation, not unlike that adopted by Pasolini: ultimate truth can only be approached by means of the purity of bodies and senses. In his search for essences, for definitive and elemental realities, the diversity of peoples offered Barragán a truly universal reference. A reference that we cannot, perhaps, dissociate from the fascination to which he appears to have succumbed in the presence of African women.

Colts in the Dawn

No one can forget such courtesy [...]
Yours is the open
field of yesterday, the colts in the dawn.
Jorge Luis Borges

By way of an epilogue I offer the image of a horse: the figure of power and dominion, an emblem of the victory over one's instincts, but also of a vehement nature that often irrupts; a friendly presence or the seal of elegance and poise.

A horseman by family tradition, both skilled at the chair and saddle, an enthusiastic member of the Club Hípico Francés, Luis Barragán knew the unique complicity that can bind a man to his saddle and built several stables at some of the sites he constructed, as well as an ample space for equestrian literature among the shelves of his library. A worldly man who tackled esthetic

problems without the slightest frivolity, Barragán knew that elegance can be a supreme virtue when it stems from a transcendental search and from a thoughtfulness with regard to others. A man who loved domesticated nature and managed to produce a work of art from our coexistence with it, Barragán would have been satisfied no doubt that posterity remembers him as a gentleman. ◪

Translated by Lorna Scott Fox

Triangular Enclosure

THREE VISITS TO THE LUIS BARRAGÁN LIBRARY

I

Spiritual Enclosures

Álvaro Mutis

I do not believe there is a more reliable or direct way to know a person than to visit his library. The books that have traveled with someone throughout a lifetime become the eloquent testimonies of the most secret corners of a soul. I can think of no better portrait.

So I was completely taken by surprise when I visited the library of the architect Luis Barragán, expecting to see long rows of books dedicated to man's oldest profession: the building of mansions by those expelled from Paradise. Instead, I was amazed to find myself in the library of a man of letters, a man with a deep religious awareness. I was overwhelmed. The extraordinary sensibility reflected in the books gathered by Barragán throughout his life revealed a soul receptive to ancient concerns.

I was puzzled by his visible predilection for certain lofty Spanish writers like Ramón de Valle Inclán and Gabriel Miró. Several editions of works by Marcel Proust and his *Remembrance of Things Past*—as well as studies on this man who some have called the greatest writer of this century—suggested that Proust was one of the architect's most loyal companions and that Barragán was one of the writer's most ardent admirers. This not only reflected the reader's curiosity but the restless nature of a man who pondered the meanings of the great themes in Proust: the traps of memory, the roads on which the past is lost and blurred, as well as the constant and painful mutability of those we love.

The collection includes books on history and biographies of prominent figures, especially mystics and scholars who have delved into the enigmas of faith. Poets, contemporaries of Barragán, are represented here by their most significant works. Barragán had an ear, no doubt, which delighted in the dexterity of style and the grace of writers now considered classics of Latin American literature.

Many of his books concern the Franciscan order and the life of its founder. The great biography of the saint written by Joergensen is included here in an original edition. This is no mere coincidence. Seeing the splendid photographs of the Barragán houses in a recent issue of the Spanish magazine *El paseante* gives one an idea of the impact that the seraphic lessons of the Poverello had on the architect. The artless play of light on his walls, the repeated allusions to the Cross, the liquid transparency over his reflecting pools, the selection of color, the clear arrangement of living spaces: these elements (the signatures that elevate Barragán's work) are secret tributes to the Franciscan ideal.

Ultimately, every architect fulfills a religious role by building the rooms in which men and women, the creatures of God redeemed by the blood of Christ, must live and work. In ancient Rome, all constructions began with a series of propitiatory rites. In all religions this inaugural rite has a transcendent meaning celebrated in countless ways.

Luis Barragán must have thoroughly understood all this for he lived with the intensity and constant inspiration of an ideal intimately tied to that which inspired the saint from Umbria and the Franciscan missionaries who came to the Americas. To preserve the library of Luis Barragán is therefore an undeniable obligation for those of us who still hope that our destiny will not be dictated by a computerized world or by the vulgarity of consumer society and its offensive greed.

The voice and work of Barragán calls us to order, to an order with which he managed to animate each house he built, each wall he constructed and each garden he designed. Barragán was moved by the faith of those who know that the creation of beauty is a lofty form of prayer. This is what I have come to think upon perusing the man's library, which is nothing less than the act of visiting the corners of his spirit. ◪

Translated by Roberto Tejada

II

Enclosures of a Dream to Be Lived In

Vicente Quirarte

The whims of urban planning made it difficult to reach Luis Barragán's Guadalajara library. Our involuntary detours en route to the place where Barragán's books reside became a tour of the local architecture.

A collection of books do not a library make, and no library exists without visitors to endow it with life. There are libraries that seem born of waste, of immoderate, indiscriminate accumulation; these are the ones to be avoided. And there are others, working libraries where each book comes as readily to hand as a student's pencil case arranged in a precise, almost military array. When Jorge Esquinca invited me "to see Luis Barragán's books," I accepted at once because this had nothing to do with a library. Libraries are good for Congress and for pedants. But *to see* Luis Barragán's books smacked far more of a child's invitation to see his toys, to handle them, to cease to envy his privilege of playing with them.

We then entered the room that housed Barragán's favorite toys. Among the many shelves there was a table on which stood a half gallon of tequila, as essential as a letter-opener or a reading lamp. Someone has written about the surprise he felt upon discovering that most of the books in Jorge Ibargüengoitia's house were history books. And in Barragán's case I had expected to find mostly volumes on art and architecture. Not at all: his overwhelming preference was for literature. Here were first editions or special reprints of French poets including Baudelaire, Mallarme and Reverdy. As I lovingly fingered through these tomes, calculated chance

led me to Baudelaire's "Les Phares," where after a litany of those artists who have formed the outlook of man, the poet condenses this "divine opium" into a single, potent beam:

> It is the *qui vive* of a thousand sentinels,
> Commands in thousands passed along
> by megaphone;
> It is a beacon burning on a thousand citadels,
> A cry of hunters stranded in the woods alone!
> *(Tr. William H. Crosby)*

I pictured Barragán's pencil underlining this verse, which in later years was to gain (literally) concrete form in his Lighthouse: a monument in the heart of Monterrey that absorbs and emits all the energy and character of that city. It is thus not too fanciful to suppose that Barragán's love for poetic syntax, for verbal organization, is what enabled him to denude the structure of all baroque frills in order to present us with the original purity of things; to give us a wall that does not shut out the sky, a fountain that ruptures monotony, buildings that seem at one with the world. Michelangelo read voraciously about the character he was intending to sculpt. Luis Barragán surely read to ferret out the intricacies of human personality, to create houses on a par with our dreams, to design plazas that would allow us to live with the city instead of next to it in ignorance, as in a bad marriage.

María Palomar and Jorge Esquinca draw my attention to a large, luxurious edition of *Le chant des morts* by Paul Reverdy, illustrated with Picasso screenprints, whose beauty has doubled their pleasure in translating the French into Spanish. Yet the book was already translated. I mean that when Barragán acquired it, he found an architectural translation: the book as building, whose spine is calculated to a specific weight, with all the relish of the architect who cannot help assessing the caliber of the paper and revelling in the perfection of the print. Such hallucinations were the fruit of the *caballo*, the tequila shot glass from which the appropriate liquor kept disappearing, miraculously conveyed from throat to belly to illuminate us in our ever more feverish perusal of the pages of Luis Barragán's books. This was an architect who looked at a book before reading it. Or more precisely, who looked at it in order to decipher with his architect's eye the messages invisible to the profane. It is impossible not to imagine the trained eye with which he weighed them, the sure hand with which he opened them or the gallantry with which he allowed them to remain inviolate like a chrysalis waiting for the wings that a reader's gaze will bestow.

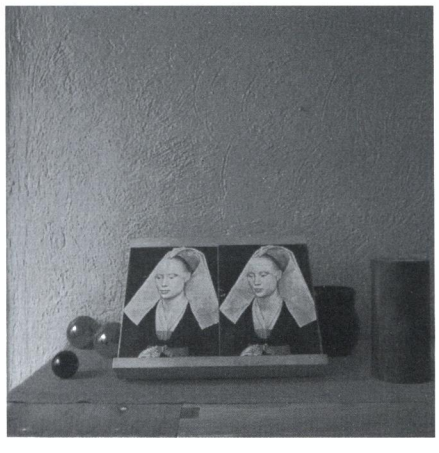
"Architecture is the synthesis of the major arts," wrote another poet-architect who worked under the pseudonym of Le Corbusier. The works of both men confirm the harmony of pencil and paper, the music of the wind as it caresses the structure, the chromatic shifts - two hour cycle. This synthesis undoubtedly includes the major art of bibliophilism of which Barragán was such a practitioner. He was not a rare edition hound, only a lover of fine editions, those whose flyleaf may evoke the golden proportions of the Pitti Palace, or whose rosettes are like the rose window of a Gothic cathedral. He loved the curlicues of a frontispiece, or the irregularities of the pages that recall the harmonious yet varied distribution of constructed space. Barragán built dreams that could be lived in, while he himself lived in book-space. In the peaceful site inhabited by his authentic heirs (his books), Barragán's great lesson is to show by the light of tequila that books are not unlike houses: open-door spaces longing to be inhabited so that they too can live.

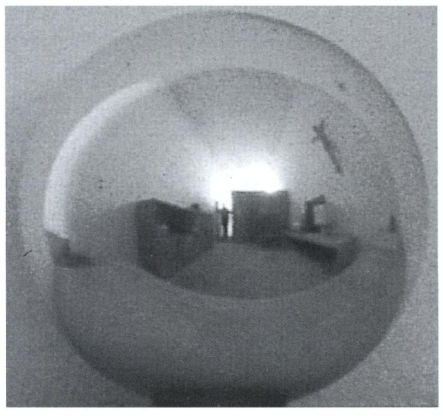
Translated by Lorna Scott Fox

III
A Garden Enclosure, Books
Jorge Esquinca

It was Meister Eckhart who wrote that an angel and a fly are equally worthy before the eyes of God. The utter vastness of that theology inspires a brethren spirit, Saint Francis of Assisi and his "Canticle to the Sun," and in the distant crepuscular atmosphere of modernism, the houses and gardens designed by Luis Barragán.

Walls, fountains, trees are infused with a precise meaning. They are filled with accuracy





Casa Gálvez. San Ángel, México, D.F. 1955. Escultura de Mathias Goeritz.

Residencia de Barragán. Monjas.

Residencia de Barragán. Esfera.

Cinco paisajes vírgenes. Jardines del Pedregal.

and truth. Far from the rattle of the proud, to the petulance of the categorical, Barragán offers a discreet elegance with regard to space. Silence, repose and contemplation might compose the emblem of his coat of arms. Light, water and stone are the letters of his elemental alphabet.

There is a common trope in literature which relates the garden to books. Both East and West agree at least on the link between friendship and that other (perhaps more intimate) bond between the murmuring half-light of the garden and that indefinable space where books loom.

Among the volumes in the library that Luis Barragán bequeathed to Jalisco—less numerous than they are select—I stop to consider two of them. I look at the dedications that Carlos Pellicer—also touched by the grace of the Saint of Assisi—inscribed in a volume of his poetry: "To Luis Barragán, prince among artists." The second is a slim French edition of the *Chants du Hoggar*, that languid voyage and initiation into love in the oases of Arabia. Among its first pages the following lines convey the highest goal of a human life: "Lord, I ask three things of you: the love of women and the love of She above all, courage in battle and forgiveness on judgement day." By turning the pages we suddenly find ourselves back in the first garden. ◘

Translated by Roberto Tejada

Enclosures and the Open Sky

A CONVERSATION OF FORMS

Mario Schjetnan Garduño

Far removed from the orthodox method of most architects, both the essential concepts and the creative process of Luis Barragán were the focus of several conversations sustained between the architect and myself during 1980 and 1981. These memorable dialogues held at his home in Tacubaya were suffused with a feeling of calm and well-being.

Our talks embraced a wide range of topics with a particular emphasis, however, on art and nature. Though timidly, I have tried to recall not only an important friendship but to underline some of the ideas behind this man who was, above all, a singular artist.

Mario Schjetnan Garduño: While many people have written about the gardens, patios and houses of Luis Barragán, little is known about your creative process: the method by which you design, the process required for each project, the rhythm of your daily routine.

Luis Barragán: I begin work each morning at about half past seven. I have lunch here with my team of architects at about four in the afternoon. My evenings are spent reading books on art and architecture, as well as novels.

I usually begin a project at the onset without setting pencil to page, without sketching a single drawing. I sit down and try to imagine the wildest things. It is a process that involves a certain madness. After this initial brainstorm, I let the ideas rest a couple of days, sometimes several days. I return to them and begin to draw small sketches in perspective, very often on a drawing pad. I usually work seated in a chair. I never design using a table or a drawing board.

Afterwards I give this sketch to a draughtsman and we begin to draw blueprints including the greenery and the ascents. We almost always use a cardboard maquette with which we work, making continuous changes.

I generally design studies for the façades and volumes drawing only the contours, leaving the mass in white. Then I place black cardboard cut-outs of varying size (pitting black and white in total opposition) arranging them in different ways, establishing diverse relationships. I usually come up with ten proposals, pinning them to the wall and choosing those I find most compelling.

Once the work has begun, I change certain walls by making them wider, lower, higher or eliminating them altogether. I feel that if a painter can completely modify a canvas, an architect should be able to do the same with his work. The work itself is a creative process.

Sometimes I have a fake wall placed to obstruct a certain angle. At the Egerstrom house, there was some opposition as to building what I considered a very striking wall for the entrance. So one day I had a structure made of wooden rollers built and we covered it with a drape cloth to simulate a wall. The owners were finally convinced and the wall was put up.

MSG: You've always used fountains and water in your gardens. Could you explain this obsession?

LB: In addition to being spatial, architecture constitutes a music played by water. Walls are important because they isolate the area of the street, which is aggressive, if not altogether hostile. Walls create a silence. With this silence we begin to make music with water. Later, the music envelops us. Louis Kahn also insisted on water and fountains. He said I was a creator of fountains. He also said something I have always liked: "When designing a fountain, it should be beautiful both with or without water."

MSG: Some years ago, during one of my visits to your house, you said that the Alhambra in Granada was one of the most beautiful monuments in the world. In addition to feeling its



beauty and being touched by it, when I finally had the chance to visit the Alhambra I began to notice certain things with regard to your work. Since that visit my passion for Islamic architecture has grown.

LB: Certainly, the beauty of Islamic architecture resides in the fact that two poles coincide: both the mystery of religion and the magic of sensuality, of eroticism.

MSG: You continually use the word mystery when referring to your work. Could you describe the term?

LB: I believe in the occurrence of mystery: the crest of a tree behind a wall.

MSG: How would you define the role of color in your works?

LB: Color is a complement to architecture. It can be used to widen or enclose a space. It is also imperative for adding that touch of magic to an area. While I use color generously, I never think about it when I'm designing. Later, I continually visit the site I'm working on at different hours of the day and I begin to "imagine in color," imagining the wildest and most incredible colors. I go back to my art books, to the surrealists, especially De Chirico, Balthus, Delvaux and the work of Chucho Reyes. Page after page I observe the images and canvases. Suddenly I spot and select some color I had previously imagined.

Afterwards, I ask a painter to even the colors on a large piece of cardboard and to place them on the bare walls. I leave them there for several days and change them in contrast to the other walls. Finally, I decide on the color I like best.

Walls are meant to be painted over and over again, perhaps every two years. In the most recent house I've built, the Gilardi house, colors play an essential role. The patio is painted in a glowing shade of lilac. The hall sets the tone for the journey through the house, leading to a very important area: the dining room with an indoor swimming pool. A pink wall emerges abruptly from the pool, slicing the water as it almost touches the ceiling. That wall gives meaning to the area. It creates a tension and releases something magical. From the ceiling a small spotlight suffuses the wall with light, emphasizing its role. Both the pink of that wall and the blue of the surrounding area were taken from a painting by Chucho Reyes.

MSG: Could you define the difference between architecture and landscape architecture?

LB: No, both involve creating a space. They form part of the same continuum. Landscape architecture is an architecture without ceilings.

MSG: To conclude, I would like to ask what you think about the transformation—if not destruction—that many of your works have undergone. I'm not referring to the private homes but, unfortunately, to those remarkable public works like the entrance to the Pedregal de San Ángel and its central park (entirely in ruins), as well as the stunning fountains at Las Arboledas, the "orange wall," the horse trough and the tree-trunk fountain—now completely abandoned.

LB: It is unfortunate that we live in an age whose supreme value is money. Hence architecture, especially landscape architecture, becomes fragile and painfully ephemeral. ◪

Translated by Roberto Tejada

NIGHTLESS ENCLOSURE

AN AFTERNOON AT THE HOME OF BARRAGÁN

FELIPE LEAL

Close your eyes and open them:
There is nobody not even yourself
Whatever is not stone is light
OCTAVIO PAZ

On a certain afternoon in April 1981, I knocked on the door of 14 Francisco Ramírez Street in Tacubaya. In front of the entranceway there was an old black Cadillac that seemed to rhyme with the half-abandoned look of the house whose façade was in a state of disrepair and exuded an air of urban indifference. As always, I was received by the maid who worked for Luis Barragán. My expectations were high: upon entering through the dark low doorway I had the sensation that the images of the interior spaces as photographed by Armando Salas Portugal would begin to take shape before my eyes in an enigmatic way.

Without a second thought, I was suddenly led to the corner of the library where Barragán used to spend most of his afternoons. I waited a few minutes, time enough for me to feel enveloped by the atmosphere of the place. I speak of atmosphere because in the work of Barragán I believe it is a particularly forceful presence, even more subjective than the space itself. On the small table in front of me there was a tall glass, generously filled with grapefruit juice for the arriving visitor. Opened in an orderly fashion to one side lay his appointment calendar in which he had written the day and hour of my visit. On another table, square-shaped and somewhat taller, were copies of the blueprints to the Gilardi house in San Miguel Chapultepec. My eyes began to anxiously roam so as to quickly register each corner and each observable view from where I was sitting.

But this motionless visual journey was not enough. In total secrecy, and with a certain childish fear of being caught in the act, I stood up and began to wander through part of the first floor. To one side of the full window separating the garden from the living room, an austere four-sided choir lectern held a book open to engravings of the towers of San Gimignano. Just behind and hanging from a folding screen was an enlarged reproduction of a monochromatic work by José Clemente Orozco which featured the white, cube-shaped houses of the Jalisco sierras and in the foreground some village women walking up a hillside. To the right on a similar folding screen hung a painting by Joseph Albers from his series of concentric squares. Turning, my eyes stumbled upon a threshold that joined the vestibule to the living room. There, leading to a very intimate private area rose a staircase over whose landing hung another image: a synthetic, all-over gold painting by Mathías Goeritz.

The imposing monastic silence almost made my every movement seem irreverent. Some-

thing very powerful was inviting me to listen and respect the silence, to adopt a contemplative attitude in the face of what I was seeing. I carefully looked at the very high ceiling and where it met the walls. Some of the walls did not reach the soffit and others enclosed certain areas. I understood the wisdom with which the walls and right angles had been arranged, as if the walls knew where to emerge, what direction to take and where to end their trajectory. I sat down again, but after ten minutes of browsing somewhat indiscretely, I realized something that Barragán had told me during my previous visit. Upon creating the threshold parallel to the garage which ends at the vestibule leading to the living room, he had wanted to make a reference to the discrete preamble to the Alhambra in Granada which leads the visitor toward the Patio of the Myrtles, that enigmatic hall of allusions to both diminutiveness and grandeur.

Within this space which is serenity itself, there suddenly appeared an elegant trim gentleman from behind the folding screen with the painting by Orozco. His impeccable cordial demeanor, uncommon nowadays, underscored the sensation of thorough harmony which I felt from the moment I arrived.

We had previously agreed to discuss specific topics, so I began by asking him about his memories of Mazamitla, the town in Jalisco where he spent most of his youth. I switched on the tape recorder, betraying the space in which I found myself, but Barragán asked me to exercise my memory and to take notes. He was in no way willing to have someone record his stuttering voice as testimony to the passing of time and to his age. Then Luis reminded me of the Biblical passage which says that in life there is a time for everything: a time to dance, a time to work, a time to meditate. His was now a time of meditation and retreat.

Once the trance was broken, we began our conversation. He recalled certain memories of his youth in Mazamitla and of the city where he was born: Guadalajara. He spoke of the red color of the earth in the countryside of Jalisco, about the hollow trunks of wood held up with wooden stakes to channel water, about the patios full of hens and cows, about the bamboo awnings, about the outbuildings, annexes and small shops. He spoke of his friends Ignacio Díaz Morales and Rafael Urzúa among others, and about his studies as a civil engineer.

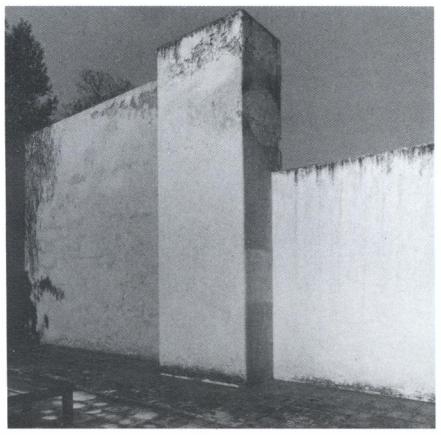
He spoke delightedly concerning various matters, but above all he relished the subject of physical place, geography and landscape, as well as the earth and the men who plant roots there. His descriptive accuracy was surprising in its authority and depth. We talked about other things: popular Mexican architecture, the role of ritual acts in spiritual enrichment, interior peace and Franciscan morals, humility, austerity and the principle of sobriety as the source of beauty. And as in all good conversation in which vitality and imagination lead the participants onto many roads, ours had led us to his limitless fervent passion: gardens. Enthusiastically, he referred to Ferdinand Bac, the man he considered his master. As we spoke through the evening hours he talked of cherished figures like Marcel Proust and the influence of Mediterranean architecture from Andalusia through Turkey. He expressed his devotion to the landscape and the need to plant architecture in the earth as if it were an act of nature. In him, I discovered a mortal enemy of present-day consumer society and its vulgarity, as well as the spaces and atrocities it generates.

Finally, Luis Barragán spoke of his work. As opposed to the school of conservatism with which he was identified for a time in Mexico due to the peculiarity of his architecture, he underscored the fact that Louis Kahn, the great North American architect of this century, invited him in 1964 to participate in designing a garden which would later become the famous esplanade to the Salk Institute in San Diego, California. It was then that Louis Kahn reminded Barragán that a fountain should be esthetic even when the water is not flowing.

As for Le Corbusier, Barragán noted that his greatest contribution was to have purged architecture of its excesses, of the unnecessary glitter, and to have undressed it, cleansed it—without a doubt, purified it. For this reason, he pardoned Le Corbusier's awful ideas with regard to urban planning and his mechanization of living spaces. And it was here that I thought about the qualities of Barragán, the conversationalist who had managed to escape from the arid derivative language usually used by those of us who are architects and accustomed to limited techniques and formal elements. Luis Barragán referred to sources and profound, conceptual observations which he accompanied with references to literature or the visual arts. He spoke about philosophy, religion, anthropology and about things that always concerned him: his people, his country, the artistic expression of villages and towns and the work of artists like Juan Rulfo, Juan Soriano, José Juan Arriola, José Clemente Orozco and Agustín Yañez.

Mexican Architect • Universal Architect. It has become commonplace to consider Barragán an architect who emerged from the vernacular architecture of Mexico. Nothing could be more simplistic. I believe that Barragán is a figure who cannot be easily reduced and that his inspiration is not the result of a sort of nationalism but of a complex cultural weaving that unfolds like a fan to include Islamic art, the ziggurats, classical Greece, the metaphysical paintings of Giorgio de Chirico, the writings of Saint Teresa of Avila, the work of Chucho Reyes, African art, the *poets maudits* (especially Baudelaire) and finally the swimming pools painted by David Hockney.

Technical Concerns • Human Concerns. Despite having studied civil engineering, Barragán's greatest concerns did not deal with constructive techniques but rather formal and symbolic experiences that enrich the spirit. His architecture was not conceived as architecture for the sake of architecture but as an architecture for contemplation.



Residencia de Barragán. Distintos ángulos de la terraza.

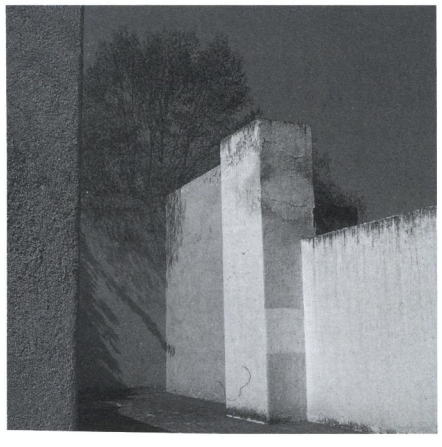
International Architecture • World Architecture. While most of his contemporaries followed international movements in architecture (rational-functionalist) with a fervent admiration and devotion, Barragán questioned at a gradual reflexive pace the results of this tendency which he knew well, having practiced it briefly himself. Later he would opt for an architecture of the senses and emotions, a sensual architecture in harmony and with the geographic environment and with the customs and habits of men and women. In a word, Barragán's is an earthly architecture.

In 1980 when he was awarded the Pritzker Prize for architecture, Luis Barragán received a sculpture by Henry Moore: a meaningful gesture given that the two artists emerged from the earth and were passionate about the fecund and fertile horizontal plane.

Grandeur • Magnitude. He liked large dimensions, magnificence, things splendid and conclusive. By magnitude I do not mean extension. The work of Luis Barragán was not prolific and it usually conformed to small format. It leads us inevitably to establish a relationship between the reserved nature of Juan Rulfo and the severity of Luis Barragán. One need only view the paintings of Vermeer (no larger than 40 x 50 cm) to learn a revealing artistic lesson. Salvador Dalí was once asked about what he thought of muralism in Mexico. The artist responded with his characteristic sense of humor by saying that there was more art in the seamstress' needle painted by Vermeer than in all the gargantuan expanse of Mexican muralism.

Orthodox Architect • Anti-Architect. Though many of his friends were architects, he did not spend most of his leisure time with them. Instead he spent time with painters, poets, sculptors and dance connoisseurs like his devoted friends Carlos Pellicer, Jesús Reyes Ferreira and Miguel Covarrubias. The fact seems relevant because his architecture is not nourished by architecture itself, but rather by traditional and contemporary culture. Things that were theoretically useless were necessary for him. In the permanent creative battle he pitted the symbolic against the functional, the spiritual against the banal, the pure against the ignominious; fantasy gained territory over reality, dignity over humiliation, the natural over the artificial, silence over scandal, solitude over tumult.

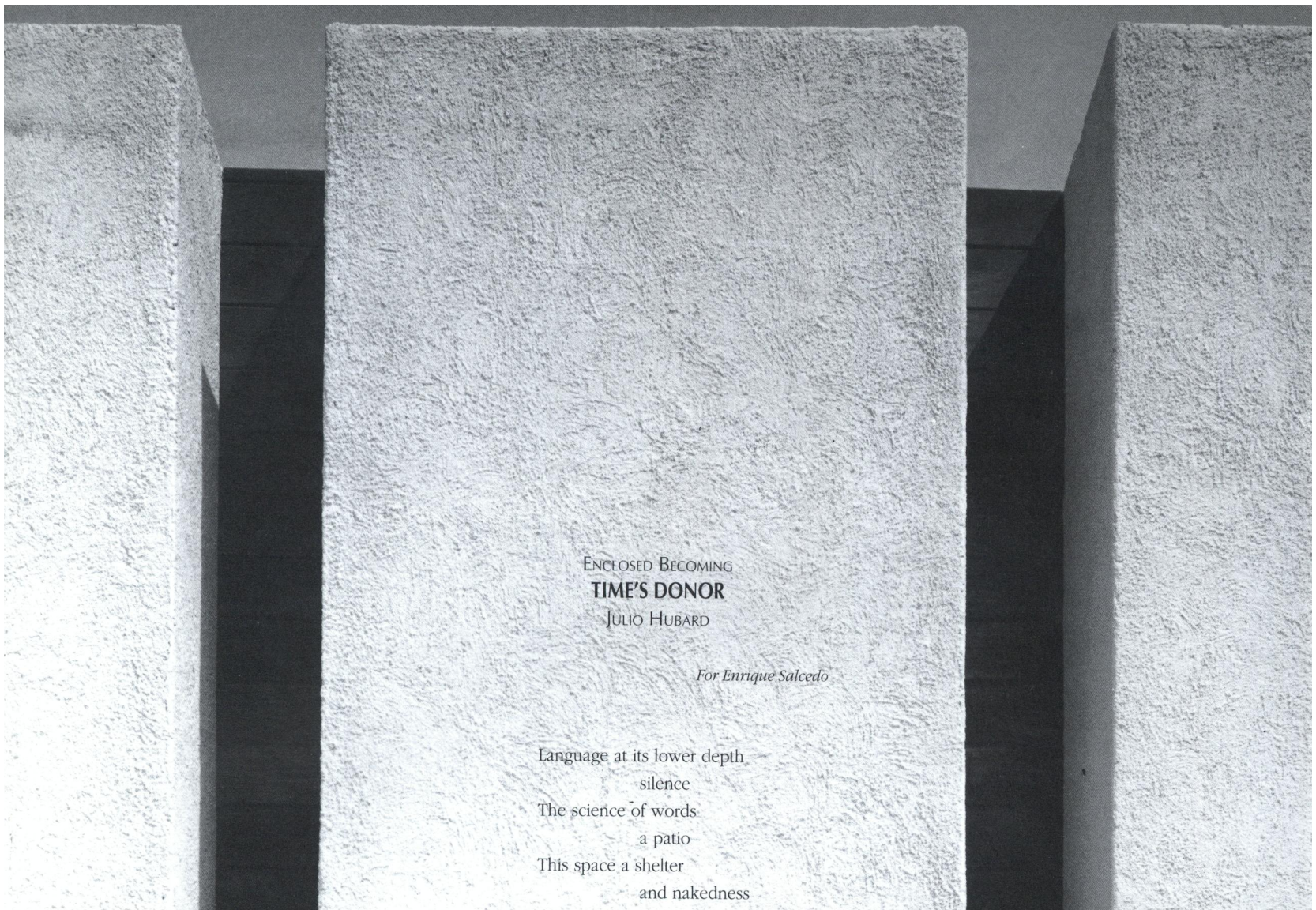
Página siguiente: Los Clubes, Estado de México, 1967-1968. Detalle.



His work method was very peculiar. He was dominated by the logic of a craftsman. In the final stage of some constructions he would allow things to be modified: either adding or removing walls, widening their density or reducing the clearing of a window. Before finishing a work he would let it repose for a while, to be observed at various hours and on different days, as if poised to follow the whims of diverse chromatic actions on his different walls. Once he assimilated the experience he made his final decisions, based on his knowledge of painting. His method was, in fact, one of a painter who allows himself to correct, erase and shed differing lights on his painting. He profiled an object much like Monet did with a series of paintings on the Rouen Cathedral. Each painting depicts the same angle of the Cathedral but each is absolutely different from the rest because of the hour of the day in which they were painted. Like Monet, Barragán placed limits on what in architecture is called prefiguration or initial conception. Each work required its time to be felt, purified and later completed. Isn't a painter's studio almost always filled with works that are incomplete or works still in progress?

Seduced by the conversation, I didn't realize that the narrow glass, served on various occasions with grapefruit juice, was now empty. Nor did I realize that the daylight had died. The evening fell irreparably. I left his monastery-fortress blinded by the luminosity of the white walls and by the glow of intelligence. I was light-headed, as if I had plunged into one of his fountains. I was received by the penumbra of the streets about which I had been warned.

Translated by Roberto Tejada



ENCLOSED BECOMING

TIME'S DONOR

JULIO HUBARD

For Enrique Salcedo

Language at its lower depth
silence
The science of words
a patio
This space a shelter
and nakedness
This pool's unbounded
limit

We are a people
in silence
in the village plaza
alone

Tacubaya
each one of us a ghost the grounds
of the convent
A bird-warble
the ripple of water
undertones lingering
overflowing
becoming air

In the mirrors of water
a horse transfigured
as it ages under the air
next to the murmuring poplar
and a peppertree trembling
in shadows on a wall

A calm rushes in to utter
its ocher voice
its orange counsel
its blue repose
for all to inhabit a colorless time ◻

Translated by Roberto Tejada