

Book Review: Beyond Modernist Masters: Contemporary Architecture in Latin America

Felipe Hernandez
Birkhauser, 2010

Reviewed by:

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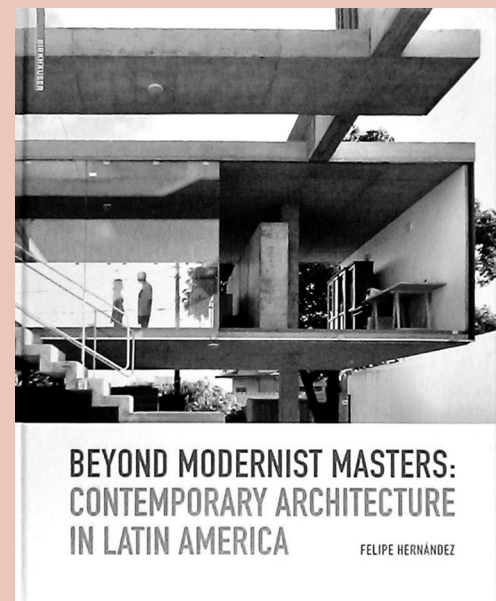
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In Latin America countries, there are various conditions which generated an architecture and urbanization. The Great and the former architects such as, Luis Barragan, Oscar Niemeyer, Rogelio Salmons, and Carlos Raul Villanueva had done the masterpiece in variety of the styles and techniques of Modern Architecture. Many architectures represent the unique characteristics of Latin America's context. Some of modernist architects whose practices flourished between 1929 - 1960 were trained abroad and worked with the world class architects such as Le Corbusier, Walter Gropius, Bruno Zevi and Louis I. Kahn. Moreover, the new generation architects such as Alejandro Aravena, Mathias Klotz, and Alberto Kalach performed and continued the substitute duty that deal with the design development of aesthetic, function, construction, and building technology and also with socio – political issue, economic, urbanization, built environment, and etc.



The book is consisted of the introduction of Contemporary Architecture in Latin American in terms of Modernist Master Architects and beyond. The secondary subjects describe the transitions and contexts of Latin America Countries: Nation – Building and Universalization: The Era of Large – scale Building, The Inscription of Latin American Buildings in The History of Modern Architecture (1929 – 1960), and Contemporary Architectures in Latin America. The first chapter, ‘Building on the City’s Edge’, examines the architectures/buildings located on the edges between planned and unplanned areas of cities which related to urban planning strategies. The dealing with rapid change, common people, construction of neighbourhoods, governments plan, community settlement, and the development of local community are the subjects.

The second chapter, ‘Public Spaces as Contact Zones’, is focused on planned/unplanned and abandoned zones of socio – cultural encounter and interaction. The case study projects express the building design on the basic of certain prevalent ideologies – mostly aesthetic, technical design, functional design, etc.

The third chapter, ‘Design for Poverty’, examines the Social Housing project: large scale unit, site, courtyard (building and open space). Architects present the development of alternative methods of design to respond to the specific circumstances of the poor. In alternative design, courtyard becomes the methods of increasing light and ventilation area. The term ‘Architecture for the poor’ used by Alexia Leon, refers to the housing project ‘Teatina – Quincha Shelter, Peru’, which is an emergency shelter for the victims of the magnitude 8.0 earthquake in 2007. She explores an indigenous construction technique, the building’s wall made of 3 materials: bamboo or cane, woven bark panels, and mud. Technically, bamboo or cane are readily available in the region, woven bark panels are reinforced to the building structure, and mud are covered

the building surface. Apparently, the creativity issue is inexpensive cost, ready to build, and local people are familiar with construction process.



Figure 1. View of Teatina-Quincha Shelter, Peru, Alexia Leon
(Source: Hernandez, 2010, p.58)

The fourth chapter, ‘The Private House’, presents a case study of single-family houses in the different parts of Latin America. Also, aims to the building styles, techniques, and method: such as, traditional way, modern style, building technology, construction’s express, building’s materials, building with open space, building access, social area, and urban-suburban-countryside house. In addition, building material as a brick, or concrete also present the art of materials and construction technique.

The final chapter, ‘Architecture in Latin American Landscape’, continues to analyze building and public space and explore various traditional buildings. The case studies show the relationship between building and natural surroundings, landscape, and natural context. According to Alberto Kalach’s ‘Landscape included people, their history, and cultures’, the term refers to the school project ‘Liceo Franco-Mexicano, Mexico’ (formerly used for agriculture and farming), a strategy in order to minimize land/area occupation to provide sufficient spaces for children to play. He created the environment as a friendly and also resilient spaces for future changes in the area.

Figure2. Liceo Franco-Mexicano, View of the classroom and the roof – gardens which double as playground / interior classroom, Mexico, Alberto Kalach (Source: Hernandez, 2010, p.132, 134)



This book also introduces about contemporary architecture and Modernist Masters in Latin America that manifests efforts and research experiments in Architectural methodology. All contents in the book provide the progress architectural works in Latin America in all dimensions. The consequence chapters describe the tradition, creativity, innovation, and problem solving that reveal the uniqueness of Modernist Masters and beyond. The architectural merit of the projects lies in the imaginative interpretation of economic, technological, physical, and cultural factors that architects carry out in order to pursue typological experimentation. Although, most of the architectural case studies excludes some countries in Central America like El Salvador, Nicaragua or Honduras, the book demonstrates the innovative solutions, produced by architects in different countries throughout Latin America. They can seemingly be substituted for architects of all Latin America. Most of the projects represent the potential of contemporary and new generation architects in Latin America. They fulfill formal explorations with great environmental concerns. Finally, the book explains the reason why architects from Latin America countries have won all major architectural awards in the world and received more international recognition in the past 10 years.

Reference

Hernandez, F. (2010). *Beyond Modernist Masters: Contemporary Architecture in Latin America*. Switzerland: Birkhauser.