
Rogelio Salmona: Espaces Ouverts / Espaces Collectifs

Curator: Silvia Arango

Cité de l'Architecture: Galeries d'Actualité, Paris

28 June to 16 September 2007

This small exhibition about Rogelio Salmona, Colombia's most prominent architect, was assembled as one of three in preparation for the grand opening of the eastern wing of the Palais Chaillot as the Cité de l'Architecture et du Patrimoine during the week of 17-23 September 2007 (see also the review of "Avant-Après" in this newsletter). Tragically, Salmona passed away at age 78, on 5 October 2007, three weeks after his exhibition closed.

Salmona was born in Paris in 1929 to a Spanish father and a French mother, who moved to Bogotá when he was a child. After studying architecture at the National University in Bogotá, he returned to Paris in 1949 to apprentice with and then work for Le Corbusier, whom he had met when he came to lecture in Colombia. In Corbusier's studio in the Rue Nungesser, Salmona worked mostly on the projects for Chandigarh. During his Parisian years he also met Alvar Aalto, whose work in brick became an important source of inspiration. Upon his return to Bogotá he opened an office and began a long series of commissions in his home town, usually employing the light-colored brick typical for the yellow clay found in that region.

Salmona urged, "We must endow our conscience with memory ... We should make an enormous effort to create, weave and prepare space, not only to withhold time, but to make it perceptible and feel it as it elapses. A human being has only his life ... It is squandered when he is offered insulting spaces." He understood architecture as a cultural undertaking, an important contribution to the political and economic struggle that he witnessed in Colombia. Among the projects shown in the exhibition, which span his career from the mid-1960s to the present, were the presidential guest house in Cartagena (1980-82), the Graduate School in the Humanities at the National University in Bogotá (1995-2000), and the slim residential high-rise towers 'Residencias el Parque' (1965-70), which contain 294 apartments and clearly profited from Salmona's respect for Alvar Aalto.

All these projects have a very careful design of their brick cladding and ornamentation in common, and convincing spatial arrangements that suggest viewpoints, paths and spaces to rest. Cloister-like courtyards would be surrounded by sheltered walkways, and the bricks would always be used for simple ornamentation. In recent years, Salmona had turned to precisely executed, light-colored concrete for his private residential commissions. In 2003 Salmona was awarded the Alvar Aalto prize, in 2004 the Dutch Prince Claus Prize.

Originally organized by the Colombian government and curated by Silvia Arango, a professor of architecture and urban planning at the National University of Colombia in Bogotá, the exhibition at the Cité de l'Architecture displayed a careful balance of models, photographs, film clips and drawings that left this visitor with the feeling of having discovered one of the most talented regional modernists of the last few decades.

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