



Taka Ishii Gallery

Photography / Film

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Armando Salas Portugal “Casa Barragán”

Dates: Oct 10 — Nov 11, 2017

Location: Taka Ishii Gallery Photography / Film

Taka Ishii Gallery Photography / Film is pleased to present a solo exhibition of works by Armando Salas Portugal from October 10 to November 11. This will be his first solo exhibition in Japan and it will feature approximately 11 photographs of master modernist architect Luis Barragán’s own Casa Barragán, of which he was the exclusive photographer for over 40 years.

Moved by the diverse natural environs of his homeland Mexico, Armando Salas Portugal traveled throughout the nation, photographing its varied landscapes including mountainous regions and valleys with many active volcanoes, deserts and highlands, remote mountains, and jungles with Mayan ruins. These images, seemingly the result of following his heart as it was moved by the beautiful landscapes and passionately photographing all that he saw, accumulated into an unparalleled documentation of the Mexican landscape. Starting in 1941, they were published in *La Montaña*, the official organ of El Club de Exploraciones de México, a citizen’s group for nature lovers, and Salas Portugal began exhibiting his photographs in solo and group shows. He met the architect Luis Barragán, with whom he would collaborate over half his life, at an exhibition in 1944 in Mexico City of Salas Portugal’s photographs, which included an image of the lava plateau Pedregal de San Ángel, where Barragán would later design a large-scale residential neighborhood.

Luis Barragán began to make a name for himself in the early 1930s in Guadalajara, where traces of Spanish colonialism remained. Barragán’s unique architectural expressions combined contemporary interpretations of traditional Mexican lifestyles seen in haciendas with the landscape design sensibilities of landscape artist Ferdinand Bac and Mediterranean architecture rooted in Arabic-Andalusian culture. While a rapidly growing population made the expansion of urban infrastructure an urgent concern, Barragán made speculations as a developer and established his position as both architect and contractee. Determined to carry out designs based on his beliefs and not the functionalist International Style popular at the time, he advocated an “emotional architecture” and built numerous important structures.

While Barragán was pushing his Pedregal project, in which he pursued an architectural expression closely tied to the unique qualities of the local site, he built a new home on the property next to his house (now Casa Ortega), which he moved into in 1948 and where he spent the rest of his life. Casa Barragán combines an understated exterior with a fertile interior space. Its sculptural walls are designed with radiant colors and indigenous materials and its spaces are composed with light and gardens. The building masterfully combines rich Mexican lyricism with the progressive Western values; it was registered as a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 2004 as a representative work of a critical regionalist architect.

While many architects construct spatial images from a bird’s eye view using flat design plans, Barragán would draw from multiple perspectives that represent the building and combine them to create the overall image. When his works were being photographed, he would give exact compositional orders. Devoted to surrealist painting and having learned from Bac’s understanding of the landscape as an important compositional element, Barragán also developed his unique aesthetic through his friendships with contemporary artists such as Chucho Reyes and Mathias Goeritz. Barragán also developed an in-depth understanding of the significance of image circulation through his involvement in property development and the speculation business. It’s likely that these views lead him to treat his actual architectural works and their photographic representations as equivalents. Goeritz, who frequently advised Barragán and also produced many of the works that adorn Casa Barragán has stated:

Barragán carefully selected photographers and worked closely with them to achieve a specific type of image of specific quality. He also controlled, as much as possible, the use and interpretation of these photographs. He paid an unbridled amount of attention to the photographic representations of his works.

Keith Eggener, "Barragán's 'Photographic Architecture': Image, Advertising and Memory," Frederica Zanco ed., *Luis Barragán: The Quiet Revolution* (Interoffice: 2002)

Salas Portugal photographed the works of many architects in Mexico City, which underwent rapid economic growth and where numerous modernist structures were built in the 1960s and 1970s. Among them, his dialogues with Barragán and his works were carried out with notable intensity and they made his works even richer and more fertile than they might otherwise have been.

Armando Salas Portugal was born in Monterrey, Mexico in 1916 (he passed in 1995). He moved to the U.S. in 1932 and he studied science at the University of California, Los Angeles from 1935 to 1938. After returning to Mexico, he traveled to various regions and acquired a camera for the first time. He documented the rich and diverse Mexican landscape from a unique perspective. Starting in 1941, these photographs were published in *La Montaña*, and Salas Portugal began exhibiting his photographs widely in Mexico. Among his photographs of Mexican architectures, Luis Barragán's works, of which he was the exclusive photographer for over 40 years, are particularly famous. Salas Portugal's major solo exhibitions include "Paisaje Mexicano" at Palacio de Bellas Artes (Mexico City, 1944–46), "Paisaje Chiapaneco" at Circulo de Bellas Artes (Mexico City, 1949), and "Luis Barragán, Architect" at the Museum of Modern Art (New York, 1980).

For further information please contact:

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11:00-19:00 Closed on Sun, Mon and National holidays