

*Landscapes of Repair: the Role of Photography and  
Film in Documenting the Legacy of Modern and  
Contemporary Architecture and Public Spaces*



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# Photographic Narratives of Modern Public Housing in Venezuela Across Two Moments

María Fernanda Jaua

## Abstract

*Unidad de Habitación Cerro Grande* and *Comunidad 2 de Diciembre*, renamed *Comunidad 23 de Enero* after the overthrow of Marcos Pérez Jiménez's military regime, are two public housing projects developed in Caracas, Venezuela, by the *Taller de Arquitectura del Banco Obrero (TABO)* during the 1950s. Both are part of the selection of Caracas buildings for the Interactive Atlas | Visual Register of Urban Architecture | Latin America 1940–1970, developed within the framework of two research projects on the relationship between photography and architecture in Latin America, directed by Professor Cristina Gastón Guirao at the Polytechnic University of Catalonia: "Recovery and Dissemination of Photographic Archives of Modern Architecture for the Development of an Operational Visual Heritage" and "Architecture, Photography and the City: Geolocation and Comparative Study of Photographic Records of Modern Architecture." This paper focuses on a selection of photographs of both complexes corresponding to two different moments in their history: the first during and shortly after their construction, the second in the present day. Through images from both periods, the article examines the modern image of progress that the dictatorship attempted to project, alongside the architectural principles, design strategies, and values pursued by the architects. By comparing early images of both projects, *Cerro Grande* from the first years and *2 de Diciembre* from the final stages of the workshop's brief existence, it is possible to identify the concessions and reductions imposed on the architects due to budgetary constraints and, more significantly, the tight deadlines required to align with the regime's propaganda program. Finally, the recent photographs offer insight into the deterioration and ongoing challenges these housing complexes face today, while also highlighting the enduring formal and spatial qualities of the original architecture and the everyday life it continues to sustain.

Keywords: architectural photography, modern housing, Latin American architecture, Caracas, Banco Obrero

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The *Taller de Arquitectura del Banco Obrero TABO* (Architecture Workshop of the Workers' Bank) was established in May 1951 to develop housing plans and design urban and residential projects to address the housing shortage among Venezuela's middle and working classes, as revealed by the 1950 National Population Census.<sup>1</sup> One of its main objectives was to eliminate the proliferation of informal housing in the country's principal cities, especially Caracas, where the largest share of the population was, and still is, concentrated. The *Banco Obrero*, a public institution founded in 1928, was responsible for managing the development of public housing programs. TABO, which underwent several organizational changes during its existence, operated from 1951 until 1958, the year dictator Marcos Pérez Jiménez was overthrown. Architect Carlos Raúl Villanueva directed the studio throughout this period, working alongside several young architects and architecture students. As Beatriz Meza notes, TABO's activity unfolded within "historical circumstances marked by the predominance of a military regime [...] the economic boom generated by oil revenues, the modernizing drive in different areas of national action, rural-to-urban migration, the urban development boom, and population growth."<sup>2</sup> For a comprehensive account of the origins and activities of TABO, we recommend consulting Beatriz Meza's doctoral thesis and her other related works, as well as Roberto Castillo's doctoral thesis. Castillo's thesis also provides an important account of both ensembles, with new drawings and photographs as part of his analysis.<sup>3</sup>

Although the focus of this article is on the role of photography, it is necessary to begin by examining the drawings of an initial, unbuilt project, which help explain the evolution of the workshop's architectural approach, the original intentions behind its proposals, and the reasons behind decisions made during its development. Carlos Raúl Villanueva and Carlos Cells Cepero designed the *Unidad de Habitantes Quinta Crespo* (Quinta Crespo Residents Unit), a project that was never built. Together with *Unidad de Habitación Cerro Grande* and *Unidad Residencial El Paraíso*, both developed during the early years of TABO's operations, this project helped establish the foundational guidelines for the buildings included in the *Plan Nacional de la Vivienda 1951–1955* (National Housing Plan 1951–1955).

The design of the *Quinta Crespo* features a 12-story block clearly influenced by the high-rise housing models developed in Europe since the 1930s, particularly those that elevated the building on *pilotis* to liberate the ground floor for communal use. Above all, its forms, spaces and

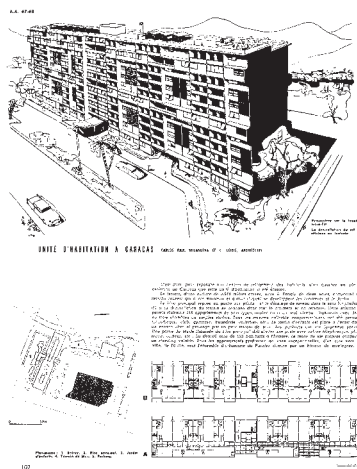
1 Meza, Beatriz. 2007. *El Taller de Arquitectura del Banco Obrero (TABO)* (PhD diss., Universidad Central de Venezuela), 10.

2 Meza, "El Taller de Arquitectura..." 10: "en circunstancias históricas signadas por el predominio de un régimen militar [...] la bonanza económica generada por los ingresos petroleros, el impulso modernizador en diferentes áreas de la acción nacional, las migraciones del campo a las ciudades, el auge urbanístico y el incremento demográfico."

3 Castillo, Roberto. 2015. *Appropriating Modern Architecture: Designers' Strategies and Dwellers' Tactics in the Evolution of the 1950s Venezuelan Superbloques*. (PhD diss., University of Kansas).

elements draw from the *Unité d'habitation* prototype developed by Le Corbusier since the 1940s. In Venezuela, such tall residential blocks are known as *superbloques*, and their relationship to European precedents is unmistakable. The National Housing Plan included numerous textual and graphic references to Le Corbusier's work. As Beatriz Meza observes:

"...at TABO, the influence of Le Corbusier is fundamental, both in terms of his theories, projects, and work organization. The workshop operated under the guidance of a Master, with architects and draftsmen working collaboratively. From the spatial and furniture layout of the space occupied by the Workshop in 1951 to the Corbusierian maxims printed on the walls, the Swiss architect's presence is palpable in the work of those developing state housing proposals for the Banco Obrero."<sup>4</sup>



4 Meza. "El Taller de Arquitectura..." 100: "en el TABO es fundamental la influencia de Le Corbusier en cuanto a sus teorías, proyectos y organización para el trabajo, en un taller donde arquitectos y dibujantes se desempeñan bajo la guía de un Maestro. Desde la distribución espacial y del mobiliario en el espacio que ocupa el Taller en 1951, hasta las máximas corbusieranas impresas en las paredes, la presencia del arquitecto suizo se deja sentir en la labor de quienes desarrollan propuestas de vivienda estatal para el BO."

[Fig. 1]  
Carlos Raúl Villanueva and Carlos Celis Cepero, Unidad de Habitantes Quinta Crespo, Taller de Arquitectura TABO. Published as "Unité d'habitation à Caracas," in *L'Architecture d'Aujourd'hui*, nos. 67–68 (1956): 91.

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The project for *Quinta Crespo* was presented at the National Housing Plan exhibition held in November 1951 and, in the following years, was published in several national and international architectural journals, including *L'Architecture d'Aujourd'hui*, nos. 67–68 (1956) (Fig. 1), as part of an extensive feature on Venezuelan architecture. The drawings clearly reflect the Corbusian themes mentioned earlier and also emphasize the three-dimensionality of the façades, with balconies and setbacks designed to protect the dwellings' interiors from heat and direct sunlight. The design of solar protection elements was a recurring concern in mid–20th-century modern Venezuelan architecture. The search for climate solutions in tropical conditions, with the specific influence of the *brise-soleil*, designed by Le Corbusier after his travels to North Africa, is likewise evident in the project.

Following this early proposal, the two projects that constitute the focus of this study mark the beginning and the end of TABO's built work. Guido Bermúdez Briceño designed the *Unidad de Habitación Cerro Grande* as his graduation thesis at the Faculty of Architecture and Urban Planning of the Central University of Venezuela. Bermúdez was Villanueva's first collaborator at TABO. While still a student, he developed the project within the workshop, and after graduating, he continued working on it with Pedro Lluberes and Carlos Brando as collaborators in the design of the shopping center. Construction began in 1952. Bermúdez remained at TABO until 1955, and during those four years, he was responsible for the design of some of the most significant prototypes developed within the workshop.

*Cerro Grande* corresponds to the *National Housing Plan*, officially proposed until 1955, but which began to be replaced as early as 1953 by the *Plan Cerro Piloto*, a new phase characterized by substantial changes in urban planning and architectural criteria, driven largely by budgetary restrictions and reflected in staff reductions. *Comunidad 2 de Diciembre*, designed and built in three stages during the last three years of TABO (1955, 1956, and 1957), is thus determined by a very different period in its short trajectory. Villanueva worked with architect José Hoffmann and José Manuel Mijares, who was still a student. The enormous complex is composed of *superbloques*, low-rise housing blocks, and communal service buildings. The model for the new *superbloques* was the *Unidad Vecinal Diego de Losada*, designed by Carlos Brando in 1953, without many of the elements and spatial qualities of the earlier proposals, in an attempt to meet the required cuts and deadlines. The state's demands, primarily related to costs and, above all, to the design and construction timelines required to meet a schedule of inaugurations that favored its publicity interests, had progressively diminished the aspirations of TABO's architects. The changes and concessions they had to make to move forward were reflected in

the reduction of spatial and material qualities of the dwellings and common spaces, as well as in the elimination of the proposed elements for climate protection. As Roberto Castillo states:

“The first three *superbloques* planned between 1951 and 1953, *Cerro Grande*, *El Paraíso*, and the unrealized *Quinta Crespo* marked a promising beginning for the *superbloque* as they included communal services and a more elaborated architectural design. When mass production became the driving force in the second stage of the National Housing Plan *Cerro Piloto* in 1954, the free-standing *superbloque* was set aside in favor of neighborhoods of multiple buildings such as the emblematic *2 de Diciembre* (later renamed *23 de Enero*).”<sup>5</sup>

Most of the photographs we know of these housing projects, so significant in Venezuelan architectural and urban history, were taken at the time of their construction or in the years immediately following. They were published and continue to appear in recent studies and, as such, have shaped the image we architects have of these complexes that have defined and transformed vast areas of the city. They were originally commissioned to promote the dictatorship's new image of modernity and progress, encapsulated in what the regime called the *Nuevo Ideal Nacional* (New National Ideal). Public works were one of the key pillars supporting this doctrine, with housing projects playing a leading role. Architects, for their part, relied on these images to disseminate the conceptual foundations of their work, as well as the specific features they considered most valuable. The housing projects developed by TABO for the Banco Obrero, together with other large-scale urban initiatives such as the *Ciudad Universitaria de Caracas*, as well as private buildings that reflected national ideals of modernization and progress, were not only featured in Venezuelan publications but also reviewed in many of the most prominent international architectural journals.

As part of the research project “Recovery and Dissemination of Photographic Archives of Modern Architecture for the Development of an Operational Visual Heritage,”<sup>6</sup> which supports this study, a significant number of photographic archives documenting modern Venezuelan architecture were catalogued. Several of these archives include images of the two projects selected for this article, especially *Comunidad 2 de Diciembre*, which was extensively photographed and more widely disseminated than *Cerro Grande*. Among the recovered materials, one envelope stood out: it contains photographs stamped with the seal of the Photography and Cinematography Service of the Ministry of Education.

5 Castillo. “Appropriating Modern Architecture...,” 65.

6 Click.org, “Recovery and Dissemination of Photographic Archives of Modern Architecture for the Development of an Operational Visual Heritage,” accessed July 29, 2025, [https://click.org.es/equipo-submenu\\_3/?lang=en](https://click.org.es/equipo-submenu_3/?lang=en).



One of these images is a photograph of *Cerro Grande* (Fig. 2), taken when it was recently built, which captures several of the architectural themes originally proposed by TABO for these housing complexes. The composition is structured around the relationship between the tall residential *superbloque* and the low-rise commercial building. The *superbloque's* volume, viewed in a foreshortened perspective, forms the backdrop for the composition. Its rigorous formal order is designed to allow for spatial and functional variations: the fourth floor is a free, open plan for common use that visually divides the structure into two segments and reveals its straightforward system of concrete porticos (this open level corresponds to the access bridges from the hill on the opposite side of the image, which were never built); on the roof terrace, also a shared space, the area is protected by a lightweight structure of four vaults that extend toward asymmetrically flat roofs; the variations of the façade reflect how the formal and structural order of the volume allow for alternating duplex and single-story apartments. The photograph is carefully composed to produce an abstract image based on the architectural elements that define the complex at multiple scales, while simultaneously illustrating the building's architectural attributes and its relationship to the site.

The *superbloque* and the low-rise commercial building are set perpendicularly, a configuration explained by the architects as a response to the needs of the complex and its urban integration: "the architectural composition opens onto Calle Real de El Valle."<sup>17</sup> This relationship with the site is better understood with two other images. One is by Colombian photographer Leo Matiz (Fig. 3). It is a view of the shopping center's volume taken from an opposite perspective. Matiz focuses on the small building's values by highlighting the inclined wall that defines the shopping center's southern boundary, the taller volume crowned by vaulted forms that acts as an articulation with the *superbloque* at the opposite end, and the connecting corridors and balconies, opening onto the open garden formed by both volumes. The relationship with the surroundings, therefore means that this garden is designed to integrate with those who live beyond its boundaries through this service building.

7 "Centro comercial Cerro Grande," *Integral* 1 (1954): n.p.



The other image is a view from the east, taken by an unknown photographer (Fig. 4). We only see a fragment of the *superbloque*, another of the shopping center and another of the garden they shape. The point of view underscores the scale of the complex in a way we couldn't glimpse in the previous images: the impressive dimensions of the residential block in relation to the small perpendicular volume. These differing perspectives remind us that photography not only documents architecture, but also actively shapes our perception of it revealing how a single built reality can sustain multiple visual narratives.

[Fig.2]

Guido Bermúdez, Unidad de Habitación Cerro Grande, Taller de Arquitectura TABO, Caracas. Photographer unknown. Servicio de Fotografía y Cinematografía del Ministerio de Educación. Museo de Arquitectura Archive, Caracas.

[Fig.3]

Guido Bermúdez, Centro Comercial Cerro Grande, Taller de Arquitectura TABO, Caracas. Photograph by Leo Matiz. Archivo Fotografía Urbana, Caracas.

[Fig.4]

Guido Bermúdez, Unidad de Habitación Cerro Grande, Taller de Arquitectura TABO, Caracas. Photographer unknown. Museo de Arquitectura Archive, Caracas.



The envelope of photographs from the Photography and Cinematography Service of the Ministry of Education also included images of the first phase of *2 de Diciembre* (Fig. 5). These focus primarily on the relationships between the *superbloques* and the lower buildings of the ensemble, through which the various open and communal spaces at ground level were articulated. These plazas and gardens, defined by the relationships between the residential blocks and the service volumes of varied shapes and functions, constitute one of the most distinctive aspects of these projects. Both the low-rise residential structures and the service buildings were fundamental to TABO's vision; without their functional, formal and spatial contributions, the workshop's model of communal living cannot be fully understood. Yet, the colossal dimensions of the *superbloques* have often overshadowed their importance.

[Fig. 5]

Carlos Raúl Villanueva, Comunidad 2 de Diciembre, Taller de Arquitectura TABO, Caracas. Photographer unknown. Servicio de Fotografía y Cinematografía del Ministerio de Educación. Museo de Arquitectura Archive, Caracas.



The previous photographs focus on the architectural ensemble, isolating it from its urban surroundings. In the backgrounds, we can glimpse distant neighborhoods and mountains, but the images do not reveal how the new construction relates to its context, particularly given that these projects were conceived to replace vast areas of informal housing. A clearer understanding of their relationship to the site can be seen in aerial views taken by the Hamilton Wright firm (Fig. 6), which documented Caracas during the 1950s, and by photographer Paolo Gasparini (Fig. 7). In Hamilton Wright's impressive aerial photograph, we can see in the foreground how the first two stages of the complex were built on land cleared by demolishing a densely packed urban grid. Gasparini's closer view of the first stage is deliberately framed toward the direction of the original colonial layout, thus exposing the radical transformation imposed by the new intervention.

**[Fig.6]**

Carlos Raúl Villanueva, Comunidad 2 de Diciembre, Taller de Arquitectura TABO, Caracas. Aerial photograph by Hamilton Wright. Archivo Fotografía Urbana, Caracas.

**[Fig.7]**

Carlos Raúl Villanueva, Comunidad 2 de Diciembre, Taller de Arquitectura TABO, Caracas. Photograph by Paolo Gasparini. Archivo Fotografía Urbana, Caracas.



UNITE RESIDENTIELLE DU 2 DECEMBRE AU CENTRE DE CARACAS



En haut du plan: Vue d'ensemble de l'ensemble, dans un état de montage qui permet de constater, au premier plan, les unités 1 et 2, au second et au troisième plan, les unités 3 et 4.

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Architectural magazines such as *L'Architecture d'Aujourd'hui* (Fig. 8) published these and other photographs of *2 de Diciembre*, along with drawings and brief explanatory texts. Through this selection of images and publications, it becomes evident that photography was one of the essential tools for presenting and disseminating TABO's projects. The workshop was influenced not only by European architectural ideas in general, and by Le Corbusier in particular, but also by their way of explaining, exhibiting, and disseminating them through photography. Carefully composed images, following the conventions of architectural photography, focused precisely on the specific themes, values, and design solutions that the architects sought to highlight.

Despite the clarity and ambition conveyed through these photographs, the material and social outcomes of these housing projects revealed a far more complex and often problematic reality. TABO's housing plans and complexes did not eradicate informal housing. On the contrary, precarious and unserved neighborhoods continued to grow and expand exponentially in the following decades. The failure to achieve this central goal of the workshop and the progressive physical deterioration of the buildings are among the most frequently cited arguments against

[Fig. 8]

Carlos Raúl Villanueva, Comunidad 2 de Diciembre, Taller de Arquitectura TABO, Caracas. Published in *L'Architecture d'Aujourd'hui*, nos. 67–68 (1956): 91.

this type of housing solution. The enormous *superbloques*, pristine in the photographs taken at the time of their completion, soon began to show visible signs of decay. Common service buildings and open spaces such as plazas, sports fields, and gardens at ground level were also transformed, not only due to lack of maintenance but also through new construction, changes in use, and the erection of walls or fences in response to insecurity.

Considered the most consummate manifestation of a failed utopian ideal, explanations for their decline have attributed responsibility equally to the country's political and social conditions and to the architecture itself, an assessment echoed in the critique of similar developments elsewhere in the world. The most widely cited case is *Pruitt-Igoe*, the public housing complex designed by Minoru Yamasaki and built in St. Louis, Missouri, between 1954 and 1955. It was through an image, a still from the video of its demolition in 1972, that Charles Jencks turned it into a symbol of the end of modern architecture.<sup>8</sup> However, the numerous well-documented studies showing that the failure of *Pruitt-Igoe* was not primarily due to its architectural design remain largely unknown, even among architects.<sup>9</sup>

Photographs also served as a vehicle for both celebrating and criticizing modern Venezuelan architecture. A particularly illustrative example is the controversy that arose in *The New York Times* following the exhibition *Architecture in Venezuela*, presented by the Venezuelan Society of Architects and the Creole Petroleum Corporation at the World Affairs Center in New York in 1957. On September 1, the newspaper's art critic, Stuart Preston, published a review commenting on two concurrent exhibitions in the city, one of which was the Venezuelan show:

"Lavishly installed, the exhibition consists of large photographic panels, enlarged color transparencies, stereo slides, maps and mosaic samples—all to the end of disclosing the daring and imagination that Caracas' new buildings embody. Anyone interested in contemporary architecture, and particularly in the use of color; in the city and regional planning and in the exploitation of new building materials would do well not to miss it."<sup>10</sup>

A week later, the newspaper published a response to Preston's review, sent to the Art Editor by Ada Louise Huxtable who would later become the paper's architecture critic in 1963. For Huxtable, "Nothing misrepresents quite as convincingly and glamorously as architectural

8 Charles Jencks. 1977. *The Language of Post-Modern Architecture*. New York: Rizzoli.

9 See, for example, Katharine G. Bristol. 1991. "The Pruitt-Igoe Myth," *Journal of Architectural Education* 44, no. 3 : 163–71; and Chad Freidrichs, dir. 2011. *The Pruitt-Igoe Myth*, documentary film. Accessed July 29, 2025, <https://www.pruitt-igoe.com/>.

10 Preston. Stuart. 2025. "Buildings of Today. Modern Architecture Featured in Shows," *The New York Times*, September 1, 1957, accessed July 29. <https://www.nytimes.com/1957/09/01/archives/buildings-of-today-modern-architecture-featured-in-shows.html>

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photography.<sup>11</sup> Her critique was directed at Caracas' new architecture in general, whose image of progress, she argued, was being built on the planned and deliberate destruction of the existing urban fabric. She used public housing as a case in point, making remarks that are notable for their lack of contextual knowledge and above all, for the condescending tone used to describe the inhabitants of the pre-existing neighborhoods:

"Caracas' famous public housing, one of the boldest and handsomest of the photographers' subjects. True, there were no nineteenth century industrial slums. But there were rural slums. These were demolished so that a primitive people, whose life consisted of a hut, a garden and a chicken or pig, could be transferred to sophisticated high-rise apartments."<sup>12</sup>

In the context of this study, the relevance of this controversy lies in the fact that both critics based their assessments entirely on a photographic exhibition, an episode that exemplifies, perhaps better than any other, the immense persuasive power of this medium.

This enduring power of photography continues to shape our understanding of modern architecture today, as seen in the recent work developed for the Interactive Atlas. *Cerro Grande* and *Comunidad 23 de Enero* are part of the selection of Caracas buildings included in the Interactive Atlas | Visual Register of Urban Architecture | Latin America 1940–1970, developed within the research project "Architecture, Photography, and the City: Geolocation and Comparative Study of Photographic Records of Modern Architecture."<sup>13</sup> The general criterion, as explained by Cristina Gastón Guirao, was to geolocate selected buildings in each city, chosen for their urban value, and compare photographs from the time of their construction with current digital images obtained from online applications such as Google Street View:

"This taking of images adapted to our online life, carried out by the members of the research team, impose some limitations that paradoxically interest us. Without being photographs in the strict sense, their value comes from acting as elements of contrast."<sup>14</sup>

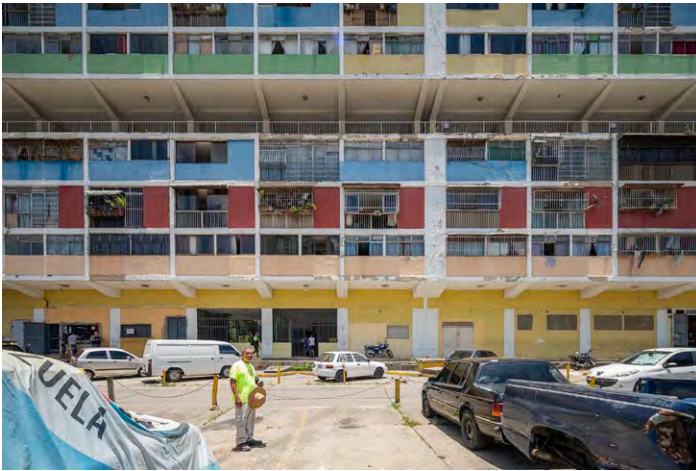
However, in the case of Caracas, such digital images were not available online. As a result, we turned to photographer Julio Mesa, then an architecture student and now a professional architect and photographer, who captured the selected buildings specifically for the Atlas' digital platform.

11 Huxtable, Ada Louise. 1957. "Dissenting View. Correspondent Questions Venezuelan Architectural Achievements," *The New York Times*, September 8. Accessed July 29, 2025. <https://www.nytimes.com/1957/09/08/archives/dissenting-view-correspondent-questions-venezuelan-architectural.html>

12 Huxtable. "Dissenting View."

13 Click.org, "Architecture, Photography and the City: Geolocation and Comparative Study of Photographic Records of Modern Architecture". Accessed July 29, 2025, [https://click.org.es/equipo-submenu\\_3/?lang=en](https://click.org.es/equipo-submenu_3/?lang=en).

14 Gastón Guirao, Cristina. 2019. "Atlas Interactive. Visual Register of Urban Architecture in Latin America: A Work in Progress," *Sophia* 4 (1). Accessed July 29, 2025. <https://www.up.pt/revistas/index.php/sophia/article/view/228>.



Interested in modern Venezuelan architecture since his student years, Julio Mesa had already begun a photographic register of relevant buildings. This effort was expanded through his participation in the Atlas project and has continued to grow in the years since. Although currently based in Barcelona, Spain, Mesa travels frequently to Venezuela and uses these visits to photograph buildings he has not yet documented, or to produce updated images of those already in his archive. On one of these trips, in late 2023, he revisited the two complexes discussed in this essay, *Cerro Grande* (Figs. 9–11) and *23 de Enero* (Figs. 12–14), focusing specifically on buildings from the third stage of the latter. This third and final stage, the most problematic of the three, was built on narrow terraces that led the architects to link up to three *superbloques* in a row. The resulting structures, with their disproportionate dimensions, have posed even greater challenges for their functioning and maintenance.

[Fig.9-11]

Guido Bermúdez, Unidad de Habitación Cerro Grande, Taller de Arquitectura TABO, Caracas. Photograph by Julio Mesa, 2023.

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Mesa's recent photographs offer a valuable disciplinary perspective on these housing complexes. They are architectural photographs composed following the rules of traditional architectural photography, as the early photographs we have examined, but now documenting the current state of the buildings and the lives they support. They reveal the severe deterioration in many of the dwellings, whose inhabitants often lack the resources needed for maintenance despite evident efforts. They also show the decayed structures, unmaintained green areas, and informal interventions. However, precisely because of Mesa's emphasis on formal order and architectural composition, we can also clearly perceive the structural logic of the original design, as well as the vitality that architecture continues to foster. In the few photographs selected for this essay, we see, for example, the value of Cerro Grande's open and ventilated common spaces, protected by carefully designed roofs and visually integrated into the surroundings. We can also see the effort to maintain these open spaces in the open circulations of the 23 de Enero superbloques and, above all, the relevance of the low-rise buildings, as they continue to create

[Fig.12-14]

Carlos Raúl Villanueva, Comunidad 2 de Diciembre, Taller de Arquitectura TABO, Caracas. Photograph by Julio Mesa, 2023.

communal spaces and bring them to life. Mesa's contemporary perspective, widely shared on his social media platforms,<sup>15</sup> is therefore a valuable contribution to the understanding of these significant complexes, which, despite foundational studies such as those by Meza and Castillo, remain largely unknown and are often assessed through uninformed or generalized views.

The Interactive Atlas | Visual Register of Urban Architecture | Latin America 1940–1970 is an invitation to engage with architecture through photography and to explore, through visual analysis, the spatial and urban significance of selected buildings. This article, as well as Julio Mesa's photographic record, responds to that call by revisiting *Cerro Grande* and *23 de Enero* through images taken with analogous visual strategies at two key moments: during their original construction and in the present day. Together, these photographs document the persistence of a design logic that allowed for spatial and functional richness, even in contexts of limitation. Through them, we recognize not only the material and functional challenges these complexes face, but also the value of the original proposals: the flexibility of the superbloque's structure, its integration to low-rise communal buildings, and the conception of open spaces that support daily life. Rather than reinforcing simplified or dismissive narratives, this visual comparison invites a more attentive reading of their built reality and architectural legacy, one that acknowledges both the challenges and the achievements that continue to shape these living spaces.

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