

## Exhibitions Review

### Luis Barragan: The Quiet Revolution

*At the Design Museum, London, March 9 - July 8 2001*

**Ayyub Malik**

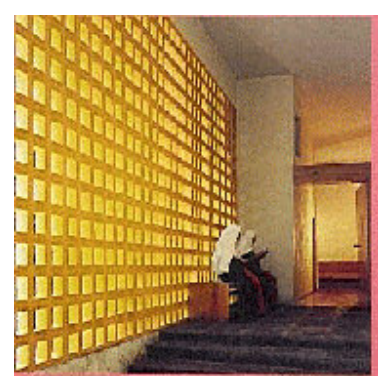
*Architect/Planner, London, UK\**



*The Quiet Revolution* is a major retrospective of Luis Barragan's work. Well respected by those who know his work, Barragan (1902-1988) is perhaps less known partly because all his works are in Mexico and partly due to his reclusiveness believing as he did that it was only through "intimate communion with nature that one can find one's true self". Using original drawings, conceptual sketches, photographs, models and videos from the Barragan Foundation archives, the exhibition provides an insight into his approach to architecture, nature and the built environment.

Barragan travelled through Europe in his youth and was influenced as much by the modern movement ideas of form and function as he was perhaps by his visits to the Moorish buildings and gardens of Alcazar and the Alhambra. In some of his most interesting work in 1940s, he used bold forms and vibrant colours to produce powerful spaces and juxtapositions, which often appeared as immense abstract compositions. He preferred the sensible over the intellectual, mixing concepts of modern art and architecture with the colours, hues and forms of his native Mexico.

Barragan saw architecture as primarily 'emotional' and an integral part of nature and landscape and renounced building to concentrate on gardens, which he considered as architecture without the roof. In 1945, he bought 400 hectare of rugged land on the outskirts of Mexico City to start the El Pedregal development of housing and gardens. This later extended to the residential developments of Los Clubes and Las Arboledas as well as the dramatic and colourful Satellite towers in Mexico City.



Despite his generally modernistic approach, Barragan considered large glazed areas as an "impudence to human need for privacy and intimacy". In most of his work, he used smaller

\* Practicing Architect/Planner and Author, London, UK. Email: malik@yyub.freemove.ac.uk

windows and large uninterrupted walls of strong colours to enclose spaces of immense visual power. With consistent boldness and sensitivity, he integrated buildings with landscape, light and shade, and water, sound, reflections and sky to create memorable experiential spaces and powerful visual compositions. Key to much of Barragon's work lies in the meeting of architecture, nature, trickling water, foliage and brightly painted walls to create a visual and sensually rich vocabulary of architecture which is both modern and at the same time, rooted in the climate, light and colours of the country.