

clorindo testa a centennial tribute

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Preliminary words

Sometimes good things happen entirely by chance. It is the case of this little book. Its origin can be traced back to a telephone conversation about a completely different subject that I had in May 2023 with Joaquina Testa, Clorindo Testa's daughter and president of the Fundación Clorindo Testa (Buenos Aires, Argentina). In that conversation we informally explored the possibility that the *Illinois Architecture Study Abroad Program at Barcelona-El Vallès* (the flagship study abroad program of the Illinois School of Architecture, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, also known as the "Barcelona Program") and its host institution, the *Escola Superior d'Arquitectura del Vallès* of the *Universitat Politècnica de Catalunya*) jointly organize a modest exhibition of Testa's architectural legacy to commemorate the centennial of his birth.

One and a half years later, that informal conversation materialized with the organization of the exhibition *Clorindo Testa, a centennial tribute* and a round table dedicated to celebrating his work. This book comprises aspects of both; on one hand, it works as a sort of catalogue of the images displayed in the exhibition, while on the other, it includes eight rather personal approximations to the work of Testa by the specially invited guests who participated in the round table held at the exhibit's opening on December 16, 2024.

The main objective of the entire project was to celebrate the work of this extraordinary architect,

but in parallel, our intention is to disseminate his work, especially to an audience that, because of geographical and generational distances, may not be familiar with the transcendence of his architectural *oeuvre*.

Based on a preliminary selection made by Federica Conte, a young Italian architect and researcher of Testa's work, the exhibit presents a brief selection of some of the architect's most significant buildings, from the emblematic and internationally praised *Banco de Londres y América del Sur* (1956-1959) to some of his late work such as the *Auditorio for the Universidad del Salvador* (1998-2000).

For the most part, this book includes the same documents (preliminary sketches, drawings, photographs) displayed in the exhibition; however, there are a few exceptions in both directions, that is, some images included in the book are not displayed in the exhibit (notably most of the images that illustrate the texts), and vice versa, not all the images shown in the exhibit are included in this volume.

In closing, we hope that those who have known Clorindo Testa and his work enjoy this little book as a heartfelt tribute, and that those who are not familiar with it discover the work of one of the most original and greatest architects of the last seventy years.

Alejandro Lapunzina

Sant Cugat del Vallès, December 2024

Pere Fuertes, Director ETSAV

Introduction (I): *Tracing Testa*

Books are precious opportunities, and this one is no exception. Its pages aim to amplify the echo of Clorindo Testa's work within the academic world, celebrating the centenary of his birth from a contemporary perspective. In doing so, both the exhibition and the book also offer an opportunity to strengthen the ties between the Illinois Architecture Study Abroad Program at Barcelona-El Vallès (IASAP-BV) from the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign and the Escola Tècnica Superior d'Arquitectura del Vallès (ETSAV), which has hosted the program since 2014.

Clorindo Testa's career spans over half a century. It both contributes to and mirrors the complex and often contradictory transformations in architecture since the 1950s. In this sense, the exhibition is a journey guided by an architect who proved to be receptive and sensitive to these changes. It is a panorama of his work and, simultaneously, a selective retrospective of Western architecture during the same period, which we owe to the wonderful support and collaboration of the Fundación Clorindo Testa.

Several photographs of Testa in his office reveal a deliberate posture, far from accidental. A hand rests beneath his face, near the mouth, while his reading glasses sit in standby mode on his forehead. The architect gazes at the photographer—and the world—with a profound and personal vision, one that has gifted us works



[1] Four portraits of Clorindo Testa, glasses up, hands resting beneath his face.

like the *Banco de Londres y América del Sur* in Buenos Aires. But when the glasses come into action, he approaches his architecture through a lens that brilliantly connects with the architectural culture of his time. Testa's work reflects this delicate balance between individual creativity and the absorption of contemporary influences.

This multifaceted gaze also applies to his remarkable versatility in painting, sculpture, and urbanism. Architecture alone was not enough for Testa, and the national and international recognition of his artistic output demonstrates a genuine artistic pursuit, showcasing his expansive talent. The intellectual breadth that Testa embodies transcends disciplinary boundaries and reveals a deep engagement with the world's complexity.

And still, there are those hands that play with his face, unveiling or concealing his mouth, shifting the balance of his head with a gentle brace. Merleau-Ponty speaks of hands with an active role

in experiencing—not limited to tools for physical action but rather engaging in cognitive processes that complement reflection, shaping our capacity to interact with the world. It is rare for Testa to articulate his architectural ideas through discourse or theory—perhaps this is why, in photographs, his hands take the place of words. Yet, in much of his work, the thought of the hands seems to translate into forms and textures that express the materiality of architecture. Testa’s work has something tactile and modelled about it.

This tactile quality invites us to experience the full physicality of his architecture. The opportunity offered by this exhibition is precisely to discover—or perhaps rediscover—the layers and nuances that demonstrate a sound and influential body of work.

The study abroad program itself can be seen as a meeting point for students and professors from both institutions, allowing for the exchange of learning experiences and cultural perspectives. On previous occasions, this connection has materialized in guest lectures, joint courses, open debates on architectural education in collaboration with the Universidad Nacional de La Plata, and a seminar and retrospective exhibition on Le Corbusier.

Now, it is Clorindo Testa’s moment.

Francisco J. Rodríguez-Suárez, Director ISoA

Introduction (II)

Clorindo Testa's *Banco de Londres* marked a singular moment in architecture. It coincided with Marcel Breuer's Whitney Museum in New York, as well as Aldo Rossi and Robert Venturi's seminal publications. Le Corbusier's Carpenter Center had recently finished construction at Harvard and the Illinois School of Architecture was about to celebrate its centennial.

In retrospect, I still remember the feeling of awe as I finally encountered the imposing concrete building during my first visit to Buenos Aires. Back then, I was around the same age as some of our study abroad students in Barcelona and had won a traveling fellowship resulting from an international design competition. Immediately, I decided to explore Latin American cities, specifically Caracas, Buenos Aires, Rio de Janeiro, São Paulo and Brasilia because I felt then, as I still do, that our architecture education failed to properly cover the so-called Global South.

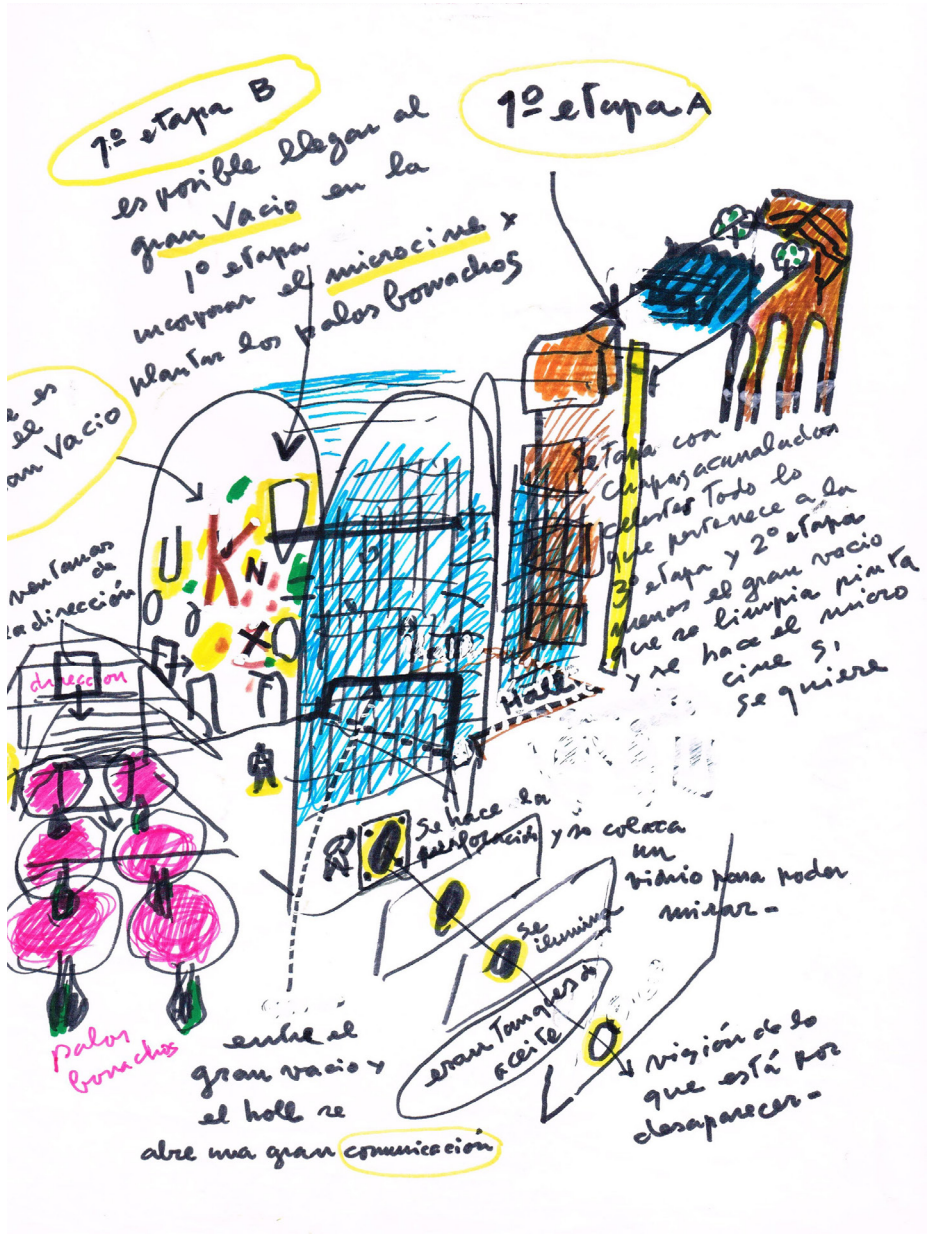
During most of the Twentieth century, the extraordinary work by architects such as Carlos Raúl Villanueva, Pedro Ramírez Vázquez, Mario Pani, Amancio Williams, Clorindo Testa, and even Oscar Niemeyer or Luis Barragán tended to be framed as a footnote at the end of a chapter or relegated to the discussions of 'critical regionalism'. Fortunately, recent efforts have resulted in important Latin American Architecture exhibitions at MoMA, Alejandro Aravena has won the Pritzker Prize, Solano Benítez has won the Golden Lion at the

Venice Biennale, and the Bienal Iberoamericana has contributed to exposing the work of talented young architects from the region. Our neighbors at IIT have also created a remarkable platform for recognizing Latin American talent through the MCHAP.

At the Illinois School of Architecture, we are proud to offer a Latin American Studio that has traveled to Santo Domingo, Santiago, Lima and San Juan, and collaborated with the City of Buenos Aires. For the first time we had a Distinguished Plym Visiting Professor from South America, and after our Alumnus César Pelli gifted the Pelli Distinguished Visiting Professorship, the position has been held by Andrés Mignucci and Elisa Silva. Interestingly, Pelli and Testa, who were both Argentinian, were only three years apart.

According to the MoMA catalogue, the “intent of the exhibition Latin American Architecture Since 1945, which explored contemporary architecture in Latin America, was not only to expose the American public to the work of the region’s leading architects, but also to demonstrate the advanced modernity of its cities.” Clorindo Testa’s exhibition is also part of a conscious effort to explore and share a particular place and time when Modern architecture in Latin America became synonymous with innovation.

As Director of the Illinois School of Architecture, I am grateful for the commitment of Prof. Alejandro Lapunzina to undertake such an important endeavor, as well as the support from our colleagues at the ETSAV in Barcelona to make it a reality. It is our sincere hope that it will positively contribute to situate this magnificent architect in his rightful place within the history of our discipline.



Alejandro Lapunzina

Clorindo Testa, a centennial tribute

In informal and casual conversations with fellow Argentines it is not unusual to hear someone referring to Clorindo Testa as “the best” Argentinean architect ever. This is quite significant considering the long list of illustrious architects born or educated in Argentina or whose work has primarily taken place there. Names such as Eduardo Sacriste, Amancio Williams, Wladimiro Acosta, Antonio Bonet, Mario Roberto Alvarez, Justo Solsona, Cesar Pelli, Machado and Silvetti, Rafael Viñoly, and many others come immediately to mind. But engaging in a debate of whether or not he—or anyone else—is the “best” ever, is truly futile and irrelevant because, fortunately, we do not have reliable instruments nor methods to determine who is the best architect.

However, what is beyond any doubt is that Clorindo Testa is one of the most important and relevant architects in the history of Argentina’s architecture. As Jorge Francisco Liernur noted, “spanning the entire second half of the twentieth century and (the first part) of the twenty-first century, his work constitutes one of the most significant and universally recognized architectural *oeuvres* in Argentina.”¹

¹ Jorge Francisco Liernur, “Clorindo Testa;” dictionary entry in the *Diccionario de Arquitectura en la Argentina*; Buenos Aires: AGEA, 2004. (pp. 108-114).

For nearly six decades of intense professional activity, he was one of the dominant figures of Argentina’s and Latin American architectural scene. Further, his work quickly transcended national and regional borders, receiving international recognition

for the quality and audacity of buildings such as the *Banco de Londres y América del Sur*.

If in the early years of his career his buildings and projects revealed the influence of Le Corbusier's most recent work, especially in India,² throughout his life he remained open to explore new avenues. The Centro Cívico in Santa Rosa, a governmental complex designed and built over a period of four decades, epitomizes this: the original masterplan and first built buildings –notably the Government Building— have obvious references to Le Corbusier's work, but as time evolved, so did the masterplan and the new buildings, from the House of Representatives, built during the second stage of construction, to the latter's free-standing library building, built in the fourth stage. All of them designed by Testa in different periods of his life stand as a testimony to the evolution of his architecture.

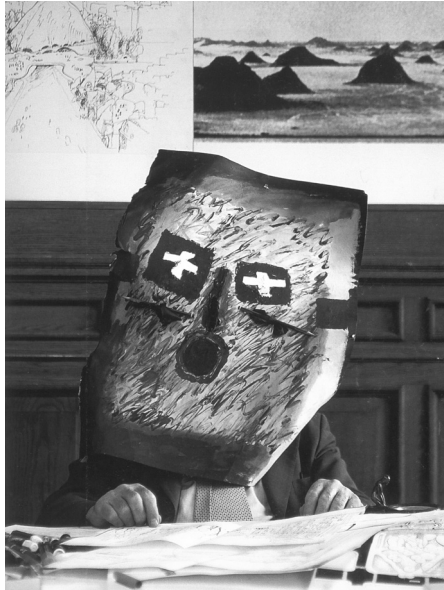
The constantly changing and evolving nature of his work had been already identified in 1983 by Marina Waisman who asserted that for Testa “each new work is an adventure of the imagination that demands to be discovered, for in each one lurks surprises, unexpected solutions, unconventional ways of solving conventional or new –recently created-- problems, newly invented situations, needs to live special places, and imagining places that might seem ‘unnecessary’ from a merely programmatic point of view.”³

This position and “architectural *modus operandi*” makes the body of his work truly unclassifiable even if the architectural connoisseur may identify signs of Brutalist architecture in his buildings and projects of the 1950s and 1960s, or of Postmodernism

² It is worth mentioning that he regarded Le Corbusier as an important influence in his work.

³ Marina Waisman, “La obra de Testa: propuesta para una lectura.” Published in the monographic issue dedicated to Testa's work of the architectural journal *Summa*, #183/184, January/February 1983. (p. 26).

[1] Portrait of Clorindo Testa with a paper mask. (photograph courtesy of © Hans-Jürgen Commerell, Berlin).



in the seventies and eighties, and even of the architecture of fragmentation that characterized many works of the last decade of the 20th century. The truth may be that the only way to classify his work is as *Clorindo's architecture*, an “architect of his time, with memory but free of historicist nostalgia,”⁴ someone who wore many masks (he had a wonderful collection of them) and constantly nurtured his imagination with an open, free –yet not uncritical— spirit.

At sixty-four years old I still do not know why I decided to study architecture. My upbringing in the outskirts of Buenos Aires had nothing to do with architecture (my parents were medical doctors) nor I really knew anything about it beyond a conventional and mundane understanding of the discipline. I did have, however, an interest in the arts in general (literature and music) and a certain intuitive curiosity for 20th century painting and

⁴ Marina Waisman, “La obra...” (p. 29)

sculpture (the paintings of Paul Klee and the mobile sculptures of Alexander Calder always fascinated me) even if I had only seen them in photographs. My knowledge of modern architecture was very limited, and that about Argentinean architecture was even poorer. But, already in the early years of my education at the Universidad de Buenos Aires Clorindo Testa and his famous *Banco de Londres* were usual references in studio courses.

I was probably 19 years old and in the second or third year of my architectural studies when, having not seen the building not even in photographs, I found myself at the heart of Buenos Aires' financial district (I area I do not recall frequenting) and therefore decided to find the building. I was certainly enthused with the prospect of seeing such a famous building in person.



[2] Interior of the Banco de Londres. (photograph courtesy of © Daniela MacAdden, Buenos Aires)

My surprise and amazement began as I approached it from a certain distance: I had no certainty that this was the building I was looking for, but who could have doubted it? Architecture –a modern architecture that I completely ignored– poured through every centimeter of the building I had in front of me. Pretending to be a client I got inside; my initial surprise and amazement multiplied exponentially. I had never been in a space like that. So –I thought– this is what modern architecture is all about. The dynamism of the space, the openness and transparency (unusual for a bank), the beauty of the exposed concrete structure, and quality of details, all left an indelible impression on me. Those were different days, and I had neither a sketchbook nor a camera with me, but –surely much better– those images are forever imprinted on my retina. Forty-five years later I can now say that it was one of the “highest” architectural experiences I have had.

Since that moment, the work of Clorindo Testa became a reference for me. It is perhaps for this reason that in 1986, when I decided to leave my home in Buenos Aires to pursue advanced architectural studies in the United States, the 1993 monographic issue of the architectural journal *Summa* dedicated to Clorindo Testa’s work that I owned was one of the few books that I made sure to carry along with me in that journey, and one that I always kept handy, still today.

In all these years of living, working and teaching in the United States and Europe (I eventually did not return to live in Buenos Aires), the work of Clorindo Testa has come up in numerous conversations with colleagues who are familiar, sometimes



[3] Cover of the journal Summa #183/184, January/February 1983.

vaguely, with his *oeuvre*. Often, the conclusion is that, despite having been widely published worldwide, perhaps if he had worked in a different geographical context (Europe, the United States) his work would be much better known, especially by younger generations. In fact, whereas there are numerous publications about his work, a comprehensive and thorough critical study of his architectural production is long overdue. This is obviously not the purpose of this publication. Instead, in producing a small exhibition of his work, and publishing this little book, the Illinois Barcelona Program along with its mother and host institutions, the School of Architecture of the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign and the Escola Tècnica Superior d'Arquitectura del Valles respectively, seek to pay tribute to Clorindo Testa and his architectural legacy at the time in which we commemorate the 100th anniversary of his birth.

Federica Conte

In search of the Argentine Language: Clorindo Testa and the covered squares of Buenos Aires

In the cultural fervor that has taken place in South America since the early 1920s, Clorindo Testa should be considered as a pioneer, not only in his constructive method approach to architectural projects but also in his broader vision of innovation behind the construction of the contemporary city.

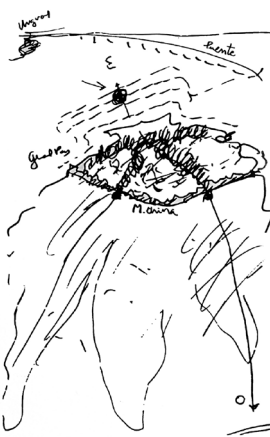
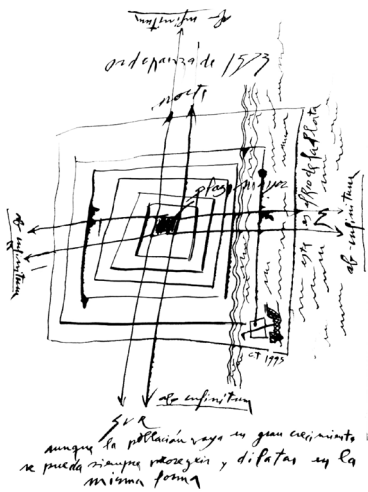
This brief essay sheds light on the idea of constructing a new vision of the city through two projects located in Buenos Aires.¹ These projects have been already widely discussed and published as architectural works in themselves, but the intent here is to use them for elucidating the idea underlying Testa's city design as a space that the entire Argentine population—not just *porteños*² — could identify with.

The grid structure established by the Laws of the Indies in the mid-16th century, a clear definition of a radially expanding “free and undefined” scheme, became the perfect worktable for this South American architect. Clorindo Testa adhered to the legacy of Spanish ordinances in a context where the city he envisioned could conform to a melting pot of cultures, capable of connecting, through “bridges and walls”, both imaginary and built, the entirety of Argentina and even extending to the coast of Uruguay.[1]

In my doctoral dissertation, the hypothesis I advance is that all of Testa's projects share a

¹ The origin of this text can be traced back to my doctoral dissertation at the Università La Sapienza, Roma. Federica Conte, Clorindo Testa. *El juego de las manzanas*, PHD thesis, Rome, July 2023. Tutor: Prof. Arc. Dina Nencini

² *Porteños* means “people of the port”. It is mainly used to refer to residents of Buenos Aires.v



[1] Two sketches on the expansion of Buenos Aires.
 a. El subconsciente de la ciudad de Buenos (1995) and b. Limits to the expansion of the city (undated). (courtesy © Fundación Clorindo Testa)

dimension in which Argentina is conceived as an island, part of a large South American archipelago. “Testa’s world” is a place where imagination exists tangibly, and art and architecture become perpetual projects for reflecting on the history of humanity, linked to the history of the city’s construction and its artifacts. He manages to connect a particular History to a universal one through an operation of abstraction, making it applicable to all of his designs.

It is no coincidence that the title of this essay refers to the “squares of Buenos Aires” rather than to specific project titles.³ Among the hundreds of references Testa draws from, the echoes of classical culture resonate strongly, from the concept of the Greek stoa to the organization of spaces of the forum and classical orders. It may seem daring to claim that Clorindo Testa, in the creation of a language seemingly distant from the canons of the Greek and Roman world, is, in my opinion, classical.

³ As in my doctoral thesis, *El Juego de las manzanas*, I decided to introduce the topic through a general theme for specifying how Clorindo’s architecture always interacts with the city and its structure: in this case the focus is on creating new squares in specific districts of Buenos Aires: Recoleta and Microcentro.

To demonstrate these aspects of his long architectural career, I have selected two themes: the construction of the city through the breaking of the rule and the consequent relationship with the classical in the urban context. The ex-Banco de Londres and the Mariano Moreno National Library provide examples through which these themes can be briefly explored.

I emphasize that both are architectural works unafraid to ride the wave of internationalization, as their goal is to enrich and give voice to a community in search of not only a cultural but also a spatial identity.

The artist-architect has developed a stylized mimesis of his actual practice as an architect, emphasizing structural elements in their relationship with the environment: the visual elaboration of space thus becomes an icon of his professional activity.

“Something like a Platonic reminiscence works obscurely within him. He is in search of what he once imagined, perhaps in another dimension of his existence, always dissatisfied with what comes from his mind and hands.”⁴

These two buildings generate “dangerous architectures” in the context of Buenos Aires, occupying a crucial space between art and architecture, where the city becomes the theater of fiction.

For many architects, art serves architecture, whereas “in my view, it must be a choice made by the architect: it should not be considered an embellishment but an enrichment in the broadest sense. It is not just an ornament; it is something

⁴ “Clorindo Testa, Architettura e tempo,” in Gabriele Cappellato, *Clorindo Testa e Juan Navarro Baldeweg. Esperienze di architettura: generazioni a confronto. I quaderni dell'Accademia di Mendrisio*. Skira editore: Mendrisio, 1996.

that actively participates in Architecture. I therefore believe that the artist should collaborate with the architect, as both can contribute significantly to society, to the city.”⁵

⁵ *Ibidem*

Both projects represent, in terms of city construction, two major meeting points, two covered squares that interpret the built environment through different strategies.

The bank

In January 1960, a private competition was called for the construction of the new headquarters of the Bank of London and South America in Buenos Aires. The renowned Buenos Aires-based architectural office SEPRA (Sanchez Elias, Peralta Ramos & Agostini), was one of the teams invited to participate in the competition. One of SEPRA’s partners, Alfredo Agostini, invited a young Clorindo Testa to join the team. The result of this collaboration was an architectural masterpiece, the *Banco de Londres y América del Sur*, located at the intersection of Reconquista and Bartolomé Mitre streets at the heart of Buenos Aires’ financial center.

The competition brief detailed not only the functional program and the quantity/quality of spaces but, above all, what would define the *architectural development*, emphasizing the importance of the symbolic value the building was to represent, with a composition of spaces that were completely flexible and reversible.

The competition jury considered that the project by Clorindo Testa and SEPRA not only best solved the functional and tectonic aspects of the bases but also transcended the realm of form, successfully achieving the symbolic dimension called for in the brief:

⁶ *In Edificio para el Banco de Londres y América del Sur en Buenos Aires, Nuestra Arquitectura* N°486, 1966, p.32.

“An architectural expression that is clear and concise, not relying on images from the past, nor on current clichés that will soon be forgotten and deemed outdated.”⁶

Thus, in August 1966, the building was inaugurated, reflecting the integrity, efficiency, and reliability of the renewed bank and serving as a symbol for the future of Argentina. These values aimed to represent the country’s early development, where optimism and confidence fueled the desire to succeed in innovation and technical capabilities.

As mentioned earlier, to define the project, the architects focused on two main points: the first concerned siting aspects – and thus the urbanistic principle of building *manzanas* (city blocks) on which the city was founded-- that led to establishing the primary need of creating a space integrated with the perimeter streets while respecting the boundary between public and private. The second point, consequent of the first, focused on the type of continuity – not just visual – that the building would maintain with the façade and the two, in fact five, surrounding buildings (not only the adjacent ones on Reconquista and Mitre streets but also the banks on the opposite side of the two streets: Banco de la Nación Argentina, Banco Alemán Transatlántico, and the Anglo-South American Bank).

Both considerations are translated into the proposed and built structural scheme in which the *ordine gigante* (giant order) concrete “shell” becomes a material embodiment of that spatial integration and continuity between not only the interior and exterior of the building but also with its surrounding context, an structure that also supports a sort of “hollow box” internally defined by “suspended trays” and stair systems.

The proposed concept reinterprets Le Corbusier's *plan libre*, not only in its solution for the ground floor – free from visual obstructions as a statement of the intention to transcend that premise– but also in a new vision where the closed system of the intersection of the manzanas becomes the ground for conceiving a new urban corner square. Throughout his career, Testa has developed, through boundless imagination and architectural design, the construction of a future Buenos Aires, open to every kind of influence and transformation.

The distorted perspectives drawn by the architect took shape in the real world, adapting to the narrow width of the two streets, and offering a solution that expands this limited dimension into the modern equivalent of the Loggia dei Lanzi.

The authors' firm decision to integrate the building into the city's system, conveys the conception that the city is constantly changing, an entity capable of evolving with the passage of time. It is, as Testa explained in an interview with Spanish architect Oriol Bohigas, is a "living and changing element, for which one must, however, pay particular attention to the laws that are capable of enduring."

The city of Buenos Aires is articulated on a system of blocks, the Spanish manzanas. The grid made by them imposes its dimensions as the rule of the entire Latin America surrounding it.⁷ In my personal interpretation, even though this characteristic of Buenos Aires is not explicitly mentioned in the interview, the author refers to this as a permanent law to be reckoned with, an element to be overcome, specifically facilitating access to the bank in this particular case and, in general, promoting its free use.

⁷ The grid system dates back to the time of Spanish colonization: buildings were erected within squares measuring 100 varas. Today, it is a distinctive feature of the city.

⁸ In the conventional construction of the *manzanas* system, the right angle is typically cut or beveled. For Clorindo Testa, this two-dimensional operation becomes a reason to shift into the three-dimensional realm. Thus, he conceives the corner as a solid and decides to hollow it out internally, creating the main true entrance to the bank.

⁹ Carlos E. Comas, *Memorandum latinoamericano: la ejemplaridad arquitectónica de lo marginal. La selva de piedra: Banco de Londres, Buenos Aires, Argentina. 1958-1966*. In 2G #8. Barcelona, 1998, p.140.

The operational strategy was to cut the walls that typically create the right-angle street into something different.⁸ He is innovative when compared to that system of permanent hidden rules, still so readable to anyone visiting the city today. It is an operation that is typologically and figuratively innovative: it marks the beginning of a journey that will, in my opinion, lead the author to become a master of invention.

Testa reads the infinite degrees of freedom that stem from the rule of the “manzana”: in other words, he reinterprets an existing code with the intent to generate new canons. Thus, the building integrates the city block “with the ability to transform while still comprehending the urban structure and establishing an extraordinary dialogue with it.”⁹

Externally, the work appears as a large reinforced concrete structure where the idea of transparency and reliability is associated with the glass envelope, hidden behind large concrete columns that, between slabs and railings, demystify the previous meaning, bringing the work back to a rawer reality: concrete illuminated by the sun reflects like the most beautiful stone; yet, in its tight rhythm, it is imprisoning, like a cage.

To access the bank, one must pass through a vestibule, a foyer, a crossing where the horizontal expanse of the great interior hall as well as the vertical space generated by the concrete slabs and glass walls are revealed. Under that gigantic architrave, the contrast between the narrowness of the streets and the plan libre of the building is enormous, accompanied by a spatial perception of “decompression and relief, similar to what someone

feels when arriving at a clearing after walking through a dark jungle.”¹⁰

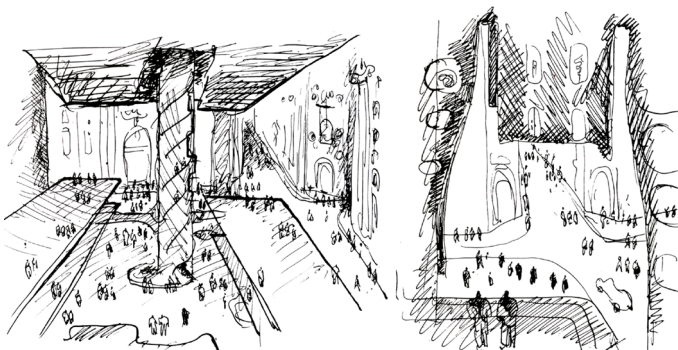
The bank’s spaces are distributed throughout a large entrance hall where public and private areas are well differentiated yet constantly connected with the outside space: the ground floor is also conceived as an extension of the street.

“The columns are set back because the competition guidelines said they wanted to widen the sidewalk, so we set all the columns back, and then the facade is behind, in glass. The idea was that the bank would occupy not only its plot of land, but as Space, it occupies everything. You see the two facades in front of you; in other words, your view does not stop at those columns nor at the suspended aluminum glass facade but, when you are inside, it is as if you were in a covered square: a space without walls, with only the roof above us. The sense you have is that there are no walls limiting the space for humans.”¹¹ [2]

The compositional research for the facade – this term is here reductive because the building’s perimeter is both structure and body – expresses a classical reference that is explicit in one of Testa’s

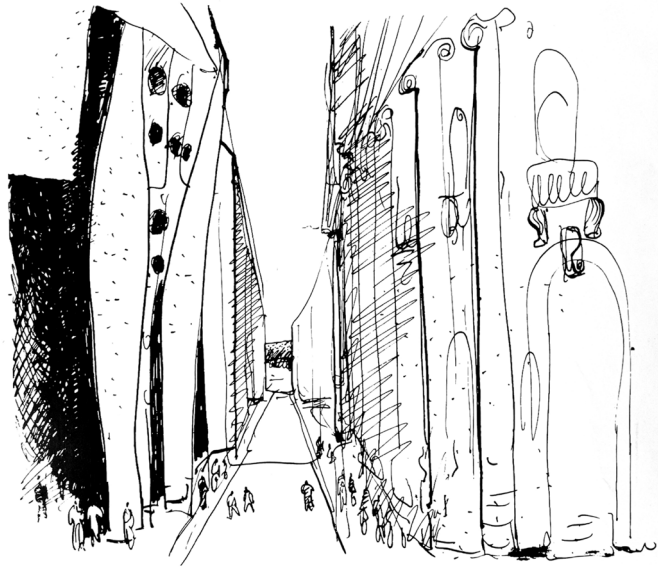
¹⁰ *Ibidem*

¹¹ From the transcription of the conference held at IUAV in May 2001 titled “Mirando al Sur: Clorindo Testa, Eduardo Urtubey: Masters of Argentine Architecture.” The quotation refers to the words of Clorindo Testa in dialogue with Luciano Semerani.



[2] The covered square and the corner. Sketches, by Clorindo Testa, 1960s. (courtesy © Fundación Clorindo Testa)

[3] Buildings compared. Sketches, by Clorindo Testa, undated (courtesy © Fundación Clorindo Testa)



sketches,[3] where he seems to mock the pilasters with Ionic capitals of the bank across the street, demonstrating how the construction of his concrete cage is spatially much more classical than the mere imitation of the opposite buildings' facade.

From a formal and constructive point of view, the imagination employed to solve each of the numerous construction details of the internal and external elements is remarkable: most of the reinforced concrete is exposed, finished with a transparent varnish only on the exterior partitions and in areas where a chromatic note was chosen as an additional element of the space.

The Banco de Londres is not the author's first work: in 1951, he had worked in the design and construction of the headquarters for the Cámara Argentina de la Construcción with architects B. Dabinovic, A. Gaido, and F. Rossi, and years later, in 1956, he won a competition for the new Centro Cívico of Santa Rosa.

Compared to previous works, at the Banco de Londres Testa takes a clear step forward in his architecture, emphasizing his obsessive search for how individual buildings must construct the fixed stage of the city. Thus, it was not an abstract desire to experiment with the power of new materials, such as reinforced concrete or steel, that drove Testa in this direction, but rather the architect's inherent curiosity to make the complexity of the city's text comprehensible.

This interpretation is even clearer in the project for the Mariano Moreno National Library.

The library

There is another district of the city where the author was called to work, Recoleta: the neighborhood that would host the new library, already famous for its monumental cemetery. From the end of the 19th century, thanks to its large parks, Recoleta became the quintessential location for Buenos Aires' bourgeoisie. This fragment of the city represented one of the obligatory thresholds for reaching the historic center, with a very particular configuration given its pronounced morphology, its proximity to the river, and the belt of agricultural buildings that would be later replaced during Torcuato de Alvear's large "modernization" of the city. Among these, we can mention the Quinta Unzué, which became the Presidential Residence during the tenure of President Perón. The lot was then burned and bombed during the coup of 1955, and from 1960 onwards, it was designated as the site for the project of the National Library. It is therefore necessary to clarify how the project, also in relation to the site on which it was built, acquired from the beginning a "collective value" for the city's inhabitants and for all of Argentina.¹²

¹² This building, despite the long duration of the construction process (more than 20 years) confronts us with the question of the nation's identity in the face of an architecture that has been transformed into a monument.

Each of the adjacent blocks contributes to the composition of the structure as a fragment of the city's system: the two streets running along the east and west sides, streets Agüero and Austria respectively, take on the character of an urban corridor, where the former acts as a barrier and the latter appears as a green horizontal connector towards the grand Avenida Libertador. Similarly, Avenida Las Heras to the south does not visually close the block but merely defines its boundary.

The proposed project, despite its modifications over time, as Clorindo himself wrote, has always sought to establish a relationship with the surroundings, whether they were part of the natural or built landscapes. The form-function dichotomy (where form is not only that of the building but also of the land and nature) certainly represented a limit that the architects had to overcome, especially because the competition organizers aimed for an innovative aesthetic result without destroying the site's landscape and urban characteristics.[4]



[4] Sketch by Clorindo Testa of the Library's covered square. Date unknown. (courtesy © Fundación Clorindo Testa)

“The author was primarily guided by the criterion of respecting the existing characteristics of the site and its surroundings, utilizing an impeccable layout for the building, which occupies space without touching the ground. [...] The external space maintains its role as the protagonist of the composition: it flows freely through the building and is always present in all the main areas, offering broad views that dominate the surrounding landscape.”¹³

As for the plan, the architects proposed elevating the main body of the building, freeing the ground from visual obstacles, allowing for the capture of all the images that the theater of the city/nature offers to the surroundings.[5]

The layout is based on a dominant longitudinal axis, though the architectural object is not symmetrically positioned along it. The artificial hill can be accessed by four different entrances, which I believe is a tribute to the silent references Testa carries with him: the west side is an homage to the Acropolis, where a staircase punctuated by vertical



[5] Covered square. Photograph of the author. Buenos Aires, December 2021. (courtesy © Federica Conte)

concrete elements simulates the Propylaea; on the east side there is a ramp inspired in Le Corbusier's style, which is reprised with a variation on the main front, towards Avenida del Libertador; the northern end also features a staircase, this time enclosed in a playful cylindrical volume, presenting itself more as an urban sculpture than as an ascending structure. Whichever access the visitor chooses, the desired effect is that of an acropolis-like architectural promenade, complex and articulated, particularly in relation to the landscape.

From the large, covered square, almost eight meters above the site's lowest point, rise four pillars that support the elevated structure, internally defined by four levels. On the two lower levels, the third and fourth floors, are the special reading rooms, including the Treasury Room; on the upper two levels, the fifth and sixth floors, house the main reading rooms, accommodating more than four hundred seats, and further study rooms.

*"It is interesting because, while respecting the landscape, something around it spontaneously changed. It truly changed: through this central space, one sees the city in a different way. On one side, you see the residential buildings, those 200 meters away, and then you turn, and in front of you is an internal space that is open, open to the point where you can see the river and beyond, you see the sky, and on both sides, the city's space. What is suspended there is a bar; to the right is the auditorium, and above are the reading rooms."*¹⁴

Beneath the large, elevated volume, three prismatic concrete elements emerge: the one facing Libertador Ave. is the auditorium, with its blind facades; in the center, like swings between two

¹⁴ *Ibidem.*

trees, there are a café and an open terrace; and at the rear end are the offices, echoing the front volume.

The ground floor is conceived as the negative of the elevated space: “When you’re underneath, you already know that the void corresponds to a solid, and that solid is the conference hall, there, just the offices, and then again the small café.”¹⁵

One of the main points of the project develops the theme of morphology¹⁶ starting precisely from the block/square: the newspaper archive and the spaces dedicated to the *Escuela de los Bibliotecarios* (School of Librarians) are only in an imaginary section on the first underground floor, as it juts out like a projection of the elevated body of the library. Thus, it appears as an extension of the large square, where Clorindo designs fixed elements like bench-handrails, combined with extrusions of cylindrical volumes that serve as sources of zenithal light for the school’s spaces. The architects had to work on two fronts: the first, what already existed, and the other, imagining something untried but for the use of the citizen. The surprise effect linked, however, to a common and already established memory: Testa speaks of a tension between what was desired and what existed that he and Bullrich always kept alive with the intent to show differentiation in the fragments of the work, also dependent on a functional and contextual aspect. However, not everything was to be revealed, especially the core of what is preserved as historical memory: the great book vault.

On the facade, Testa conceived a solution where only a keen eye perceives the dimensional difference of these four volumes, which differ as if

¹⁵ *Ibidem*.

¹⁶ Here the term “morphology” refers both to that of the site and the urban context: the former constructs an artificial hill, already shaped by the existing slope of the plot, serving as the podium for the new square in relation to the surrounding blocks, which are meant to provide the backdrop for the city stage on which the library project will rise.

they were the front and back legs of that famous glyptodon Clorindo often spoke about. The pillars are not “pure parallelepipeds”; they are adorned with lateral wings that, despite the nearly two-meter difference, always coincide with the slab beam system of the first floor.

The autonomy of each element is emphasized by the surface of the concrete, where the various volumes, plastically sculpted, are characterized by textures of different directions and sizes. It is clear that, a few years after completing the Banco de Londres building, Testa is fully exploring the world of concrete as a tool capable of shaping and bringing to life his world of ideas and his vision for a Buenos Aires in transformation.

The entire project is a journey of discovery through various spaces, with ascents and descents, and unexpected openings onto specific parts of the city; the author pushes us towards continuous search for details: “I like to think of this idea that the building should be an *aparición* (an appearance). I want the work to be able to vary depending on different points of view, even in relation to what is seen through this window or that other one.”¹⁷

The library is an urban device with a unique character: it is both a metaphor and an allegory of “a civic architecture with extraordinary expressive power, capable of embodying the sense of redemption of an entire nation through the value of culture and knowledge.”¹⁸ This building’s contribution to the construction of a new Buenos Aires can be summarized in two points, similar to the case of the Banco, where it disrupts the regularity of the existing system while continuously engaging with it: the hill highlights the

¹⁷ *Ibidem*.

¹⁸ Armando Dal Fabbro, *Macchine metaforiche, allegorie urbane e altre cose*, DPA Marsilio, Venezia, 2003.

morphological flow of the Recoleta neighborhood, offering a covered square as a stage from which to observe the various urban *happenings*; the elevation of the volume above ground level reflects the intentions of the competition organizers, who wished to give the building's most noble part—the reading room, as the dissemination of cultural memory—a space that could summarize the entire history of Argentina. Clorindo elevates it to such a degree that, from the rooftop, one's gaze stretches towards the Rio de la Plata, towards Uruguay, towards the Ocean, connecting it to the distant history of Buenos Aires' founding.

The library has become an unintended monument to procrastination, the wait for a beginning that has lasted over thirty years. Yet, every construction site is synonymous with industry and change. Even during this long period of “immobility”, the building was experienced by the city as if it were a ruin, an artifact that “has no functional use or purpose, but is simply lived in by virtue of its material presence in the surrounding environment. Sometimes a building is most attractive in this way, without inhabitants, without users: a sculpture, a promise, a secret.”¹⁹

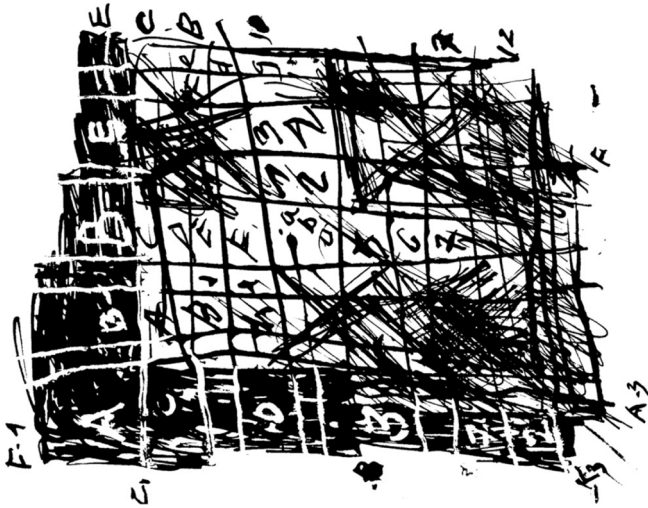
It engages in an endless dialogue with both built and imaginary city structures, with the architects he collaborated with, with his family, with the artists and politics of the time. I conclude the essay by referring to a thought from one of his most trusted collaborators, Oski Lorenti, who said that: “the substantial thing –Testa always repeated to him– was the process behind each of his works. The process was always creative in the way he defined it, as a *process-encounter*. The search behind projects like the Banco de Londres or the hundreds

¹⁹ Ben van Berkel, Caroline Bos, “Time and timelessness in Two buildings by Clorindo Testa.” In Manuel Cuadra, Alfonso Corona Martinez, *Clorindo Testa, Architect*. Nai publishers, Rotterdam.

of competitions we participated in was never about providing a definitive answer. We weren't discussing what the final goal was —*las búsquedas no fueron hacia algo*— but our ability to remain open to what would reveal itself along the way, with freedom yet with great disciplinary coherence.”

In this process, the space for compositional freedom emerged because Clorindo delved into the broader sense of what is “necessity.” Each decision was considered for its relative, rather than absolute, value: it was placed on the worktable, open to the possibility of always being changed or even modified by someone else. In a certain sense, he never would have talked about a search, but rather of an imagined world constructed around the concept of “open”.

I believe that it is precisely for this reason that, today, Testa's office is called Clorindo Testa Estudio Abierto. This openness led the author to the discovery that the real world could be associated with different worlds; hence his desire to retrospectively interpret his buildings as “animals,” where the act is that of a metamorphosis of what we know. In the transformation, something unusual happens because, in each of his projects, there exists that refined ability to lead the viewer to experience something unknown yet expected. The existence of something other than oneself is at the foundation of all his works, which, in my opinion, are moments and memories of urban architecture— and here I use the words moment and memory because they exist and live over time, defining, through their construction, a past memory, and through constant dialogue with the city, one that is evolving.



[6] *Cuadrículas con letras y/o números.* Serigraphy, 2000 (courtesy © Fundación Clorindo Testa)

Thus, it is not just the work itself that demonstrates his mastery in the art of building, but the entire journey between the idea, the built work, and the city.

In this way, he manages to give new meaning to the city block (*manzana*), no longer subject to the rules of the Spanish grid.[6]

Buenos Aires breathes through its large squares and reclaims the landscape of the pampas through the constellation of Clorindo Testa's projects, spanning from the city to the countryside. He thus reformulates a new statute for the Buenos Aires of the future, where the theme of irony is the interpretative key that ties together all the periods of his vast production: not only as a demonstration of non-conformity with the harshness of the world around him, but as a capacity to transcend the techniques of constructing architectural space.

Clorindo Testa's sketch study for a housing scheme in Lomas del Tafí



Selected Works

Centro Cívico Santa Rosa

Santa Rosa's Civic Center

La Pampa (Argentina), 1956-1963, and 1972-1976

Banco de Londres y América del Sur

Bank of London and South America

Buenos Aires (Argentina), 1959-1966

Biblioteca Nacional Mariano Moreno

National Library Mariano Moreno

Buenos Aires (Argentina)

1962 (competition), 1972-1995 (construction)

Centro Cultural Recoleta

Recoleta Cultural Center

Buenos Aires (Argentina), 1979

Two auditoriums

Auditorium Soka Gakkai [Auditorio de la Paz]

Soka Gakkai International Auditorium

Buenos Aires (Argentina), 1993-1996

Auditorium Universidad del Salvador

Universidad del Salvador Auditorium

Pilar (Argentina), 1998-2000

Individual Houses

Residence Guido di Tella

Buenos Aires (Argentina), 1975

Casa Capotesta

Pinamar (Argentina), 1985-1987

Casa "La Tumbona"

Ostende (Argentina), 1985-1987

House for Mrs. R.

Exaltación de la Cruz (Argentina), 1998-2000

Painting

Centro Cívico Santa Rosa

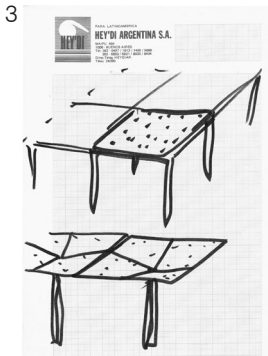
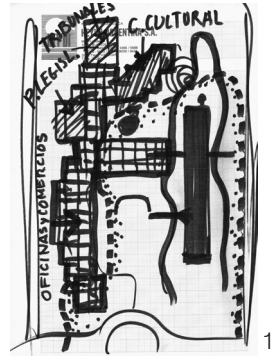
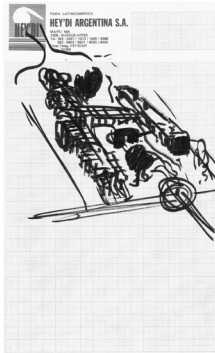
[Santa Rosa's Civic Center]

La Pampa (Argentina), 1956-1963, and 1972-1976

with Francisco Rossi, Augusto Gaido, and Boris Davinovic (Government's Building)
with Hector C. Lacarra, Augusto Gaido, and Francisco Rossi (Legislative Palace)

In the mid-1950s, working in collaboration with Francisco Rossi, Augusto Gaido, and Boris Davinovic, Testa won the competition for the design and construction of the Civic Center of Santa Rosa (capital city of the Province of La Pampa in Argentina's geographical center) which was to be located outside the city's historical center.

The first stage entailed the construction of the Government building and related buildings for ministries. These were organized around a covered plaza placed at the center of the site that was also meant to work as a connector between the government building and future buildings for other branches of government such as the Legislative Palace. This plaza is defined by a forest of columns that support hyperbolic concrete umbrellas perhaps inspired by Amancio Williams' famous shading structures for a hospital complex in Corrientes.





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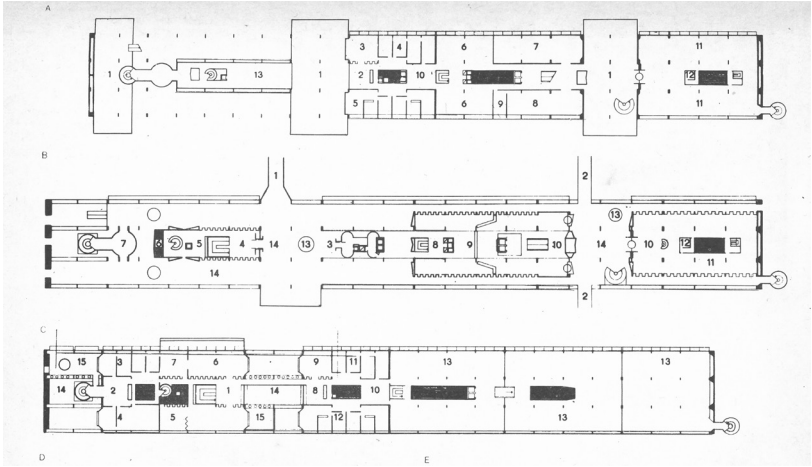


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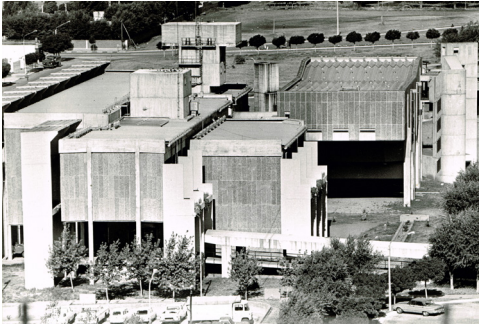
[1-3] Sketches by Clorindo Testa
[4] View of central plaza with area covered with concrete umbrellas
[5, 6] Government building exterior
[7] Government building, interior



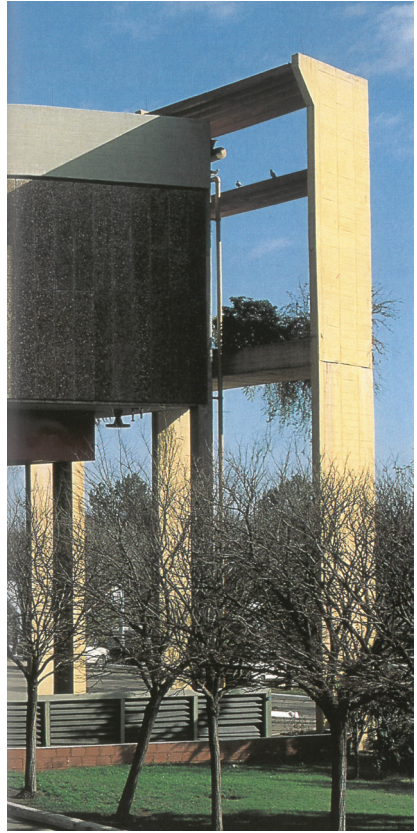
The Government building is a long rectangular box in exposed reinforced concrete with obvious reminiscences to Le Corbusier's work in India which Testa had visited shortly before designing this building.

A quarter of a century later a new competition was called for designing the Palace of Justice and a cultural center. Clorindo Testa won again this competition, now in association with Hector C. Lacarra, Augusto Gaido, and Francisco Rossi. This new project reflects the evolution of Testa's work, now characterized by more fragmented and heterogeneous volumetric compositions, and the use of a much wider palette of forms and materials that revealed his preference for vibrant colors diverse textures. The library for the Legislature is one of the last buildings designed by Testa for the Civic Center of Santa Rosa over four decades of intense work.

[1] Government building, plans
 [2, 3] Government building, exterior
 [4, 6] Camara de Diputados (House of Representatives) exteriors
 [5] House of Representatives' library (4th stage of construction)



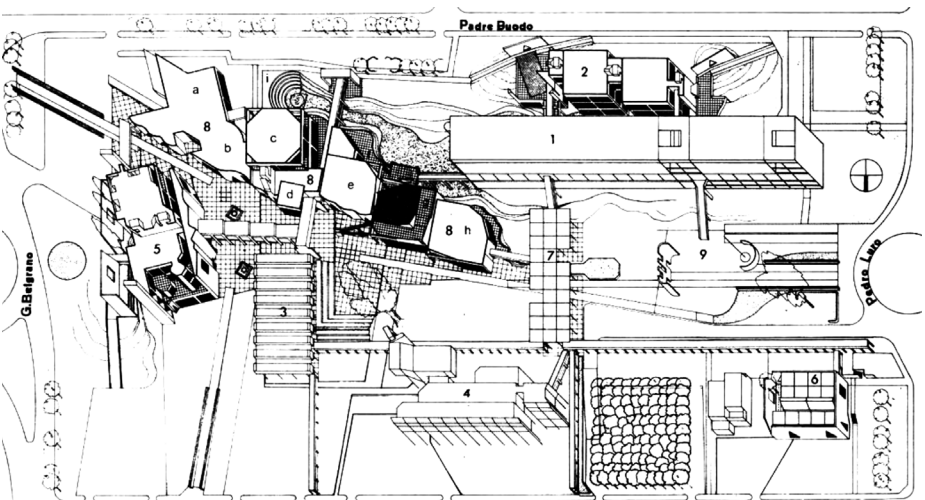
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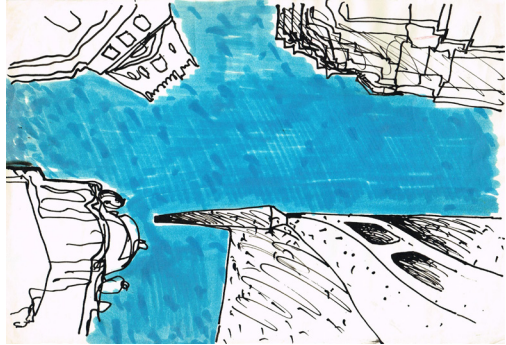
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Banco de Londres y América del Sur

[Bank of London and South America]
Buenos Aires (Argentina), 1959-1966

with Santiago Sánchez Elía, Federico Peralta Ramos and Alfredo Agostini (SEBRA)

The Banco de Londres y América del Sur (now Banco Hipotecario Nacional) is, undoubtedly, Testa's most emblematic and internationally known building. From an architectural and urban perspective, it is a remarkable exercise of critically and contemporarily fitting in a dense urban fabric, particularly at a corner intersection in which the buildings opposite the two streets share similar height and an eclectic/neoclassical bank-institutional style dating from the late 19th and early 20th centuries.



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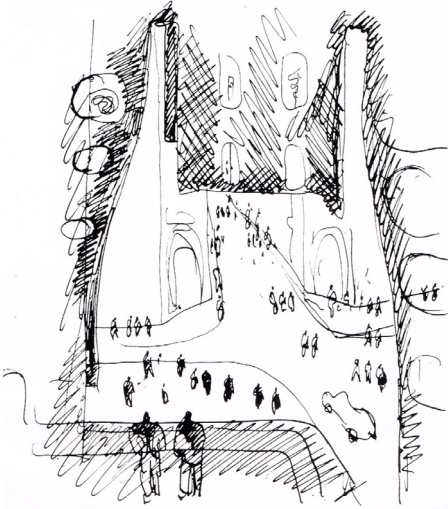
[1, 3, 4] Clorindo Testa's sketches
[2] View of streets' intersection,
from ground to sky
[5, 6] Exterior views towards the
building's entrance



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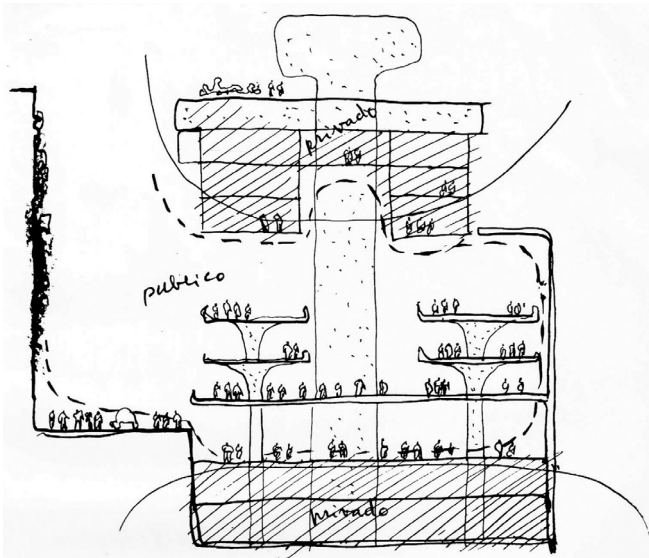
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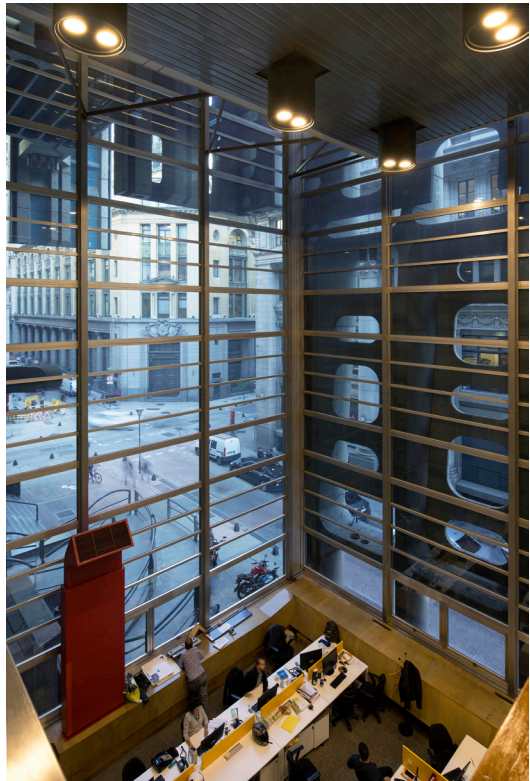




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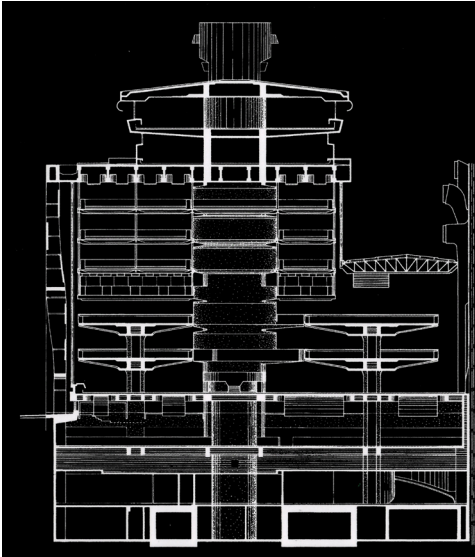


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- [1] Clorindo Testa's sketch study
- [2, 3] Interior views
- [4, 6] Transversal and longitudinal sections
- [5] Floor plans (ground, first and second levels)

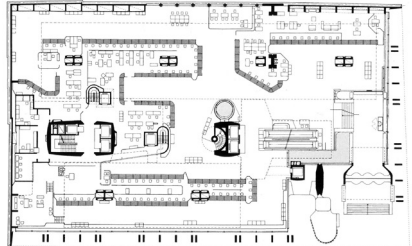
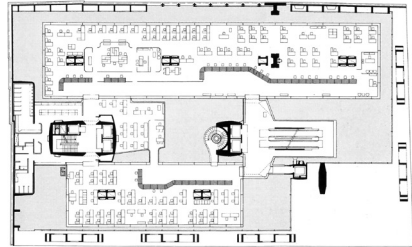
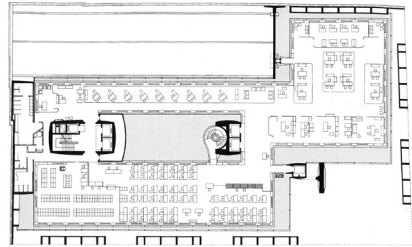


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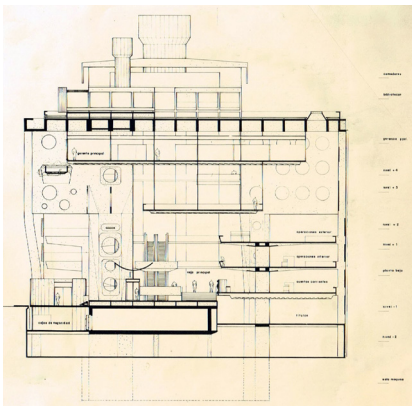
Consisting of six floors, two free-standing and four suspended from the roof (excluding underground levels), the building works as a sort of covered plaza that blurs the distinction of outside and inside, challenging the notion of the public realm of the city and the protected space of a private banking institution, something that is reinforced by carving out the corner of the building's virtual volume.

The structure consists of a permeable giant order of sculptural columns that span the building's entire height and support the horizontal structure from where the suspended levels are hung. Its material expression in exposed reinforced concrete has earned the building a significant place among the so-called Brutalist Architecture of the 1950s and 1960s.

The necessary secure enclosure of the building is defined by fully glazed skin that encloses a dramatically dynamic space. Placed on the inner side and completely detached from the concrete structure that defines the building's exterior volume, this skin epitomizes the many *inversions* (outer structure/inner enclosure, supported/suspended structure, indoor covered plaza) that this building subtly proposes.



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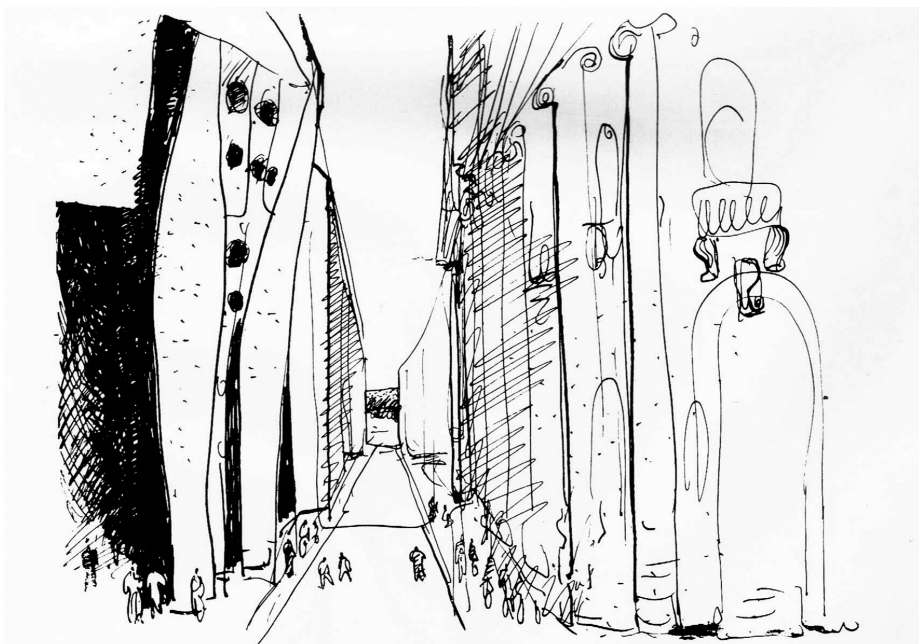
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[1, 4, 5, 6] Several views of the building's distinctive exterior concrete skeleton and glazed enclosure

[2, 3] Clorindo Testa's sketch studies

Biblioteca Nacional Mariano Moreno

[National Library Mariano Moreno]

Buenos Aires (Argentina), 1962 (competition), 1972-1995 (construction)

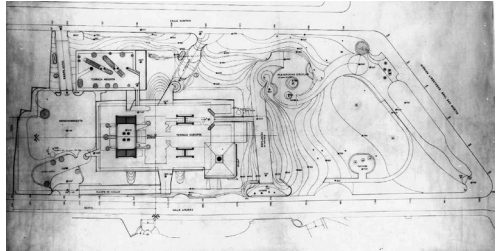
with Francisco Bullrich and Alicia Gazzaniga de Bullrich

The project for the Biblioteca Nacional is the result of what perhaps was the most important competition in the history of Argentina's architecture. relevant works.

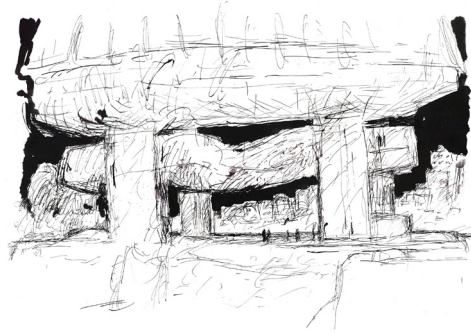
The project's organization of areas and spaces is based on a clear logic: stacks are placed in several underground levels to protect books from light and sun exposure, while the reading rooms are located high up in a volume open to the four horizons with ample vistas and abundant natural light. At a metaphorical and symbolic level, it may also be a reference to the openness of the pampas.

The elevated volume of the reading rooms is supported by four massive concrete legs that accommodate some services and vertical circulation. Below them, a series of formally autonomous volumes housing diverse functions (for instance, the auditorium) are suspended above an open platform that serves as the building's main entrance. Echoing the Banco de Londres y América del Sur built only a few years earlier, this is again a covered plaza in which there is yet another reversal: the sides are open, but the central space is covered (instead of a traditional plaza in which a central space open to the sky is defined by lateral enclosures).

Construction of the building began a few years after the competition was awarded; however, the numerous political and economic crisis suffered by Argentina in the last quarter of the 20th century paralyzed construction for a long time, leaving the imposing concrete structure as a ruin emerging from the ground that resembled and unnamed and ageless creature.



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[1] Site plan

[2, 4] Sketch studies by Clorindo Testa

[3] View of entrance from covered plaza

[5, 7] Exterior views

[6] View from covered plaza towards the park



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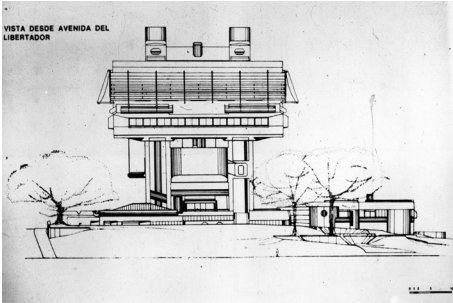
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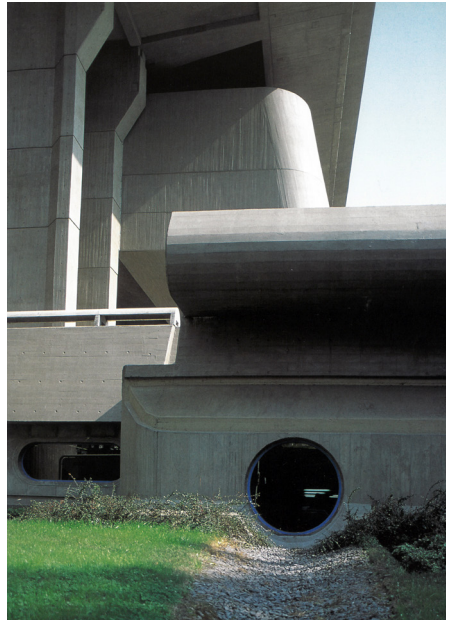
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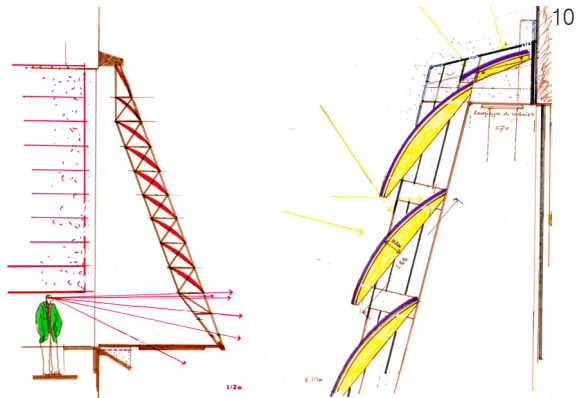


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Construction finally resumed in the 1990s and the building finally opened to the public in 1995. However, major features remain pending; the most significant are the screens that protect the reading rooms from excessive sunlight to which Testa devoted numerous studies.



10

Centro Cultural Recoleta [+Paseo del Pilar]

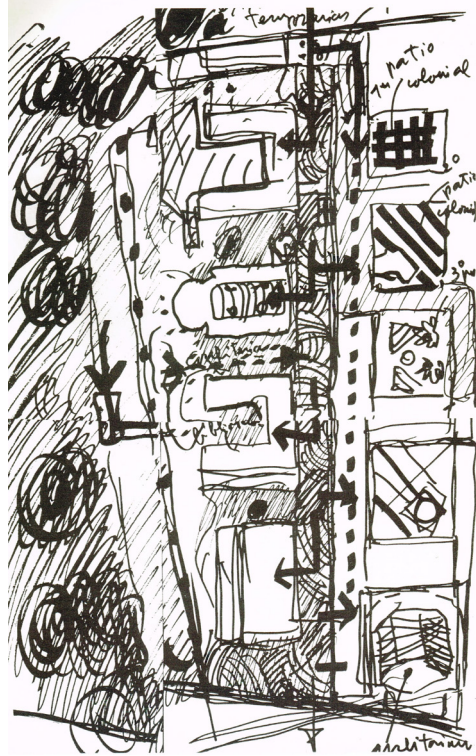
Recoleta Cultural Center [+Paseo del Pilar]

Buenos Aires (Argentina), 1979

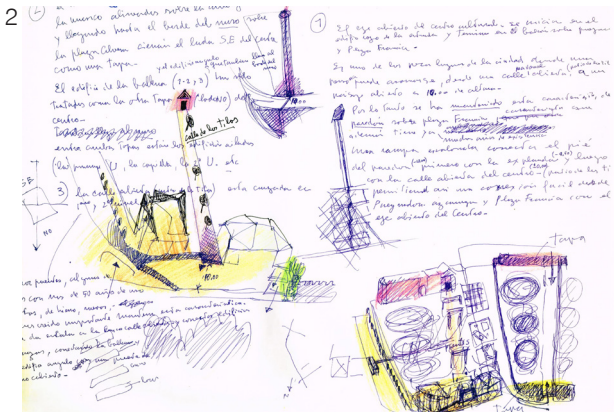
with Jacques Bedel and Luis Benedit

The Centro Cultural Recoleta consists of several autonomous and independent cultural facilities and institutions housed in a single building complex that involved the recuperation of built structures of an 18th century convent that, after the order's dissolution, subsequently served as prison, hospital, asylum and art school. Rather than re-functionalizing or adapting the various existing buildings for each of the different cultural entities, Testa and his two younger collaborators—also architects and plastic artists—conceived an architectural ensemble through the addition of a variety of elements and the careful, quasi surgical intervention on the historical buildings that entailed preservation and restoration work of the built structures as well as of their related outdoor landscape elements (patios, historic trees, etc.).

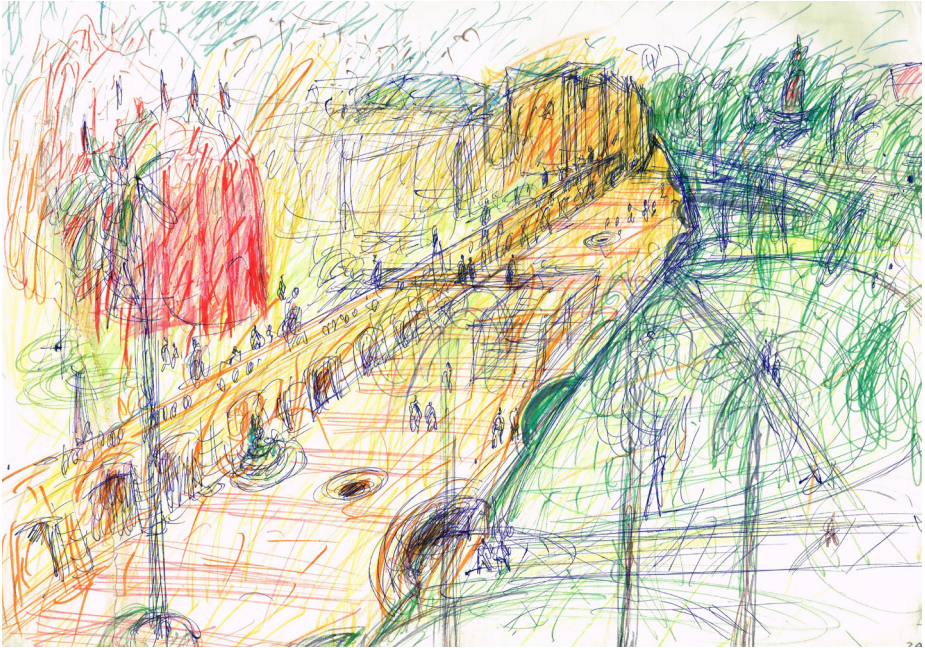
The key element of the intervention was the creation of a central spine, an open-air 'street', that links and provides access to the different components of the cultural complex.



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[1-3] Sketch studies by Clorindo Testa
 [4] Aerial view of Paseo del Pilar, with Cultural Center on the rear portion of the image (in the foreground, to the right is the currently closed commercial building)
 [5] Cultural Center's internal open-air street

The whole is characterized by a remarkable assemblage of disparate elements that shamelessly exhibit heterogeneous architectural languages, and (at that time) an unexpected use of color and material textures, an aspect that distinctly characterized Testa's work in the late 1970s and 1980s.

The adjacent and related Paseo del Pilar is an urban stroll related to a (currently closed) commercial facility also designed by Testa ten years later.



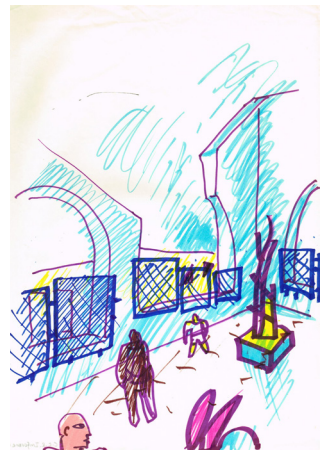
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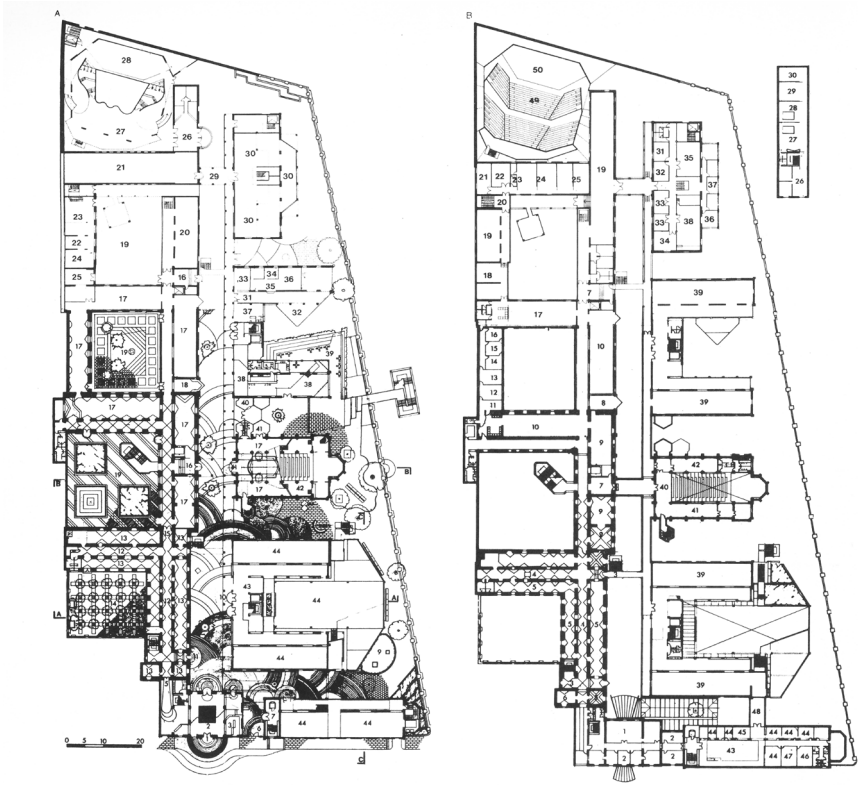
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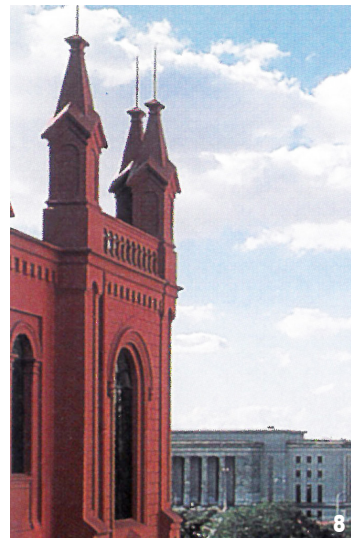
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[1, 4] Sketch studies by Clorindo Testa
 [3] Cultural center, axonometric
 [5] Cultural Center, floor plans
 [2, 6, 7] Images of complex's exterior

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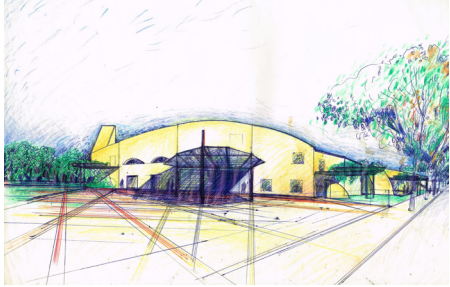
Auditorium Soka Gakkai [Auditorio de la Paz]

Soka Gakkai International Auditorium
Buenos Aires (Argentina), 1993-1996

with Eduardo Bompadre

Commissioned by an international secular Buddhist movement originated in Japan—the Auditorio de la Paz is both a cultural center and a place of worship. The building comprises an auditorium with capacity for nine-hundred people and a variety of rooms for other activities. Rather than facing either one of the two streets of the site (approximately one-quarter of the city block), Testa generated a plaza at the center of the block that operates as both the main entrance to the building and an outdoor gathering area.

The auditorium is placed on the upper level, accessible through stairs/ramps that slowly ascend from the entrance to the opposite side of the building. Seating areas are softly inclined platforms detached from side walls.



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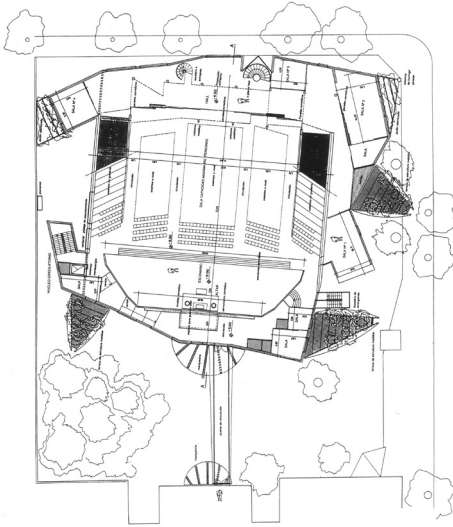
At the rear of the audience hall stand three free-standing columns painted in vivid colors and crowned with capitals inspired in lotus flowers (a symbolic reference to Soka Gakkai's principles). Opposite them is the stage/altar behind which an ample corridor with openings cut in geometrical forms offers views back to the plaza generated at the heart of the city block.

[1, 7] Sketch studies by Clorindo Testa

[3] View of entrance to Auditorium

[2, 5, 6] Auditorium's interiors

[4] Floor plan and front elevation



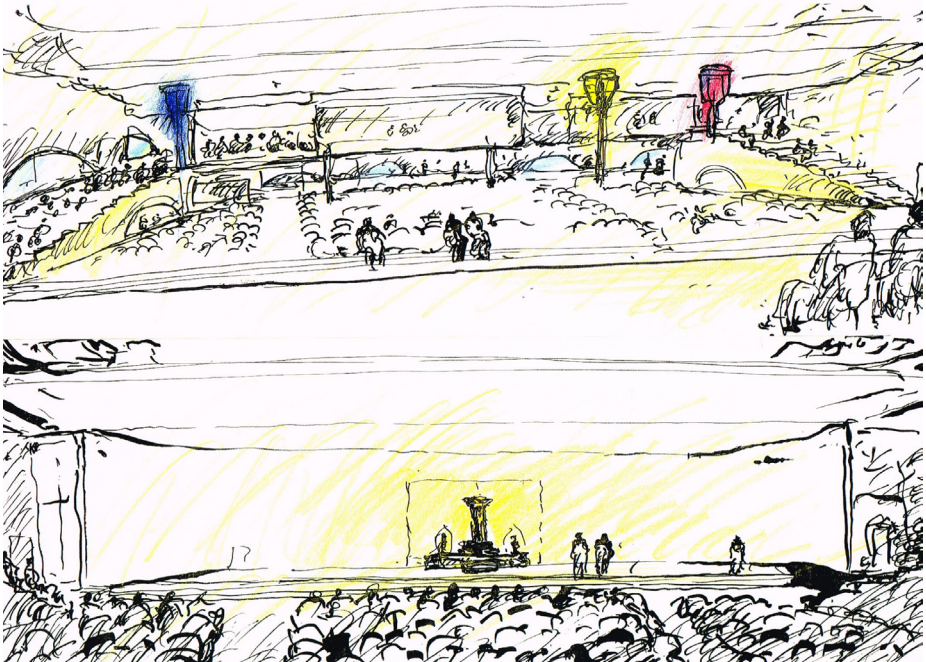
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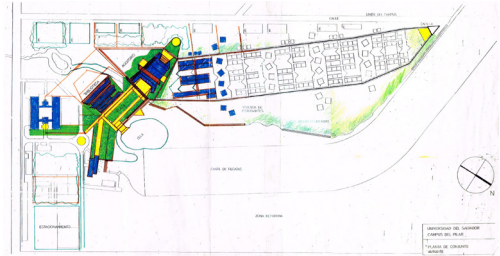
Auditorium Universidad del Salvador

Universidad del Salvador Auditorium
Pilar (Argentina), 1998-2000

with Juan Fontana and Eduardo Bompadre

Towards the end of the 20th century the Universidad del Salvador, a prestigious private university based in Buenos Aires, commissioned Testa to design the Auditorium and Library for the institution's rather recently created campus in Pilar, sixty-kilometers northwest of the institution's traditional home in Buenos Aires. The two buildings stand opposite each other, connected by a bridge over the Río Luján.

The building for the auditorium sits on the rather open site, emerging from the landscape as an artificial hill. It is built in green-painted concrete and is covered by a metal roof that follows the outline of the building from one edge of the ground to the other. In plan, as well as volumetrically, the building resembles the shell of a mechanic crawling animal, or perhaps a vessel of unknown origin gently posed on the ground.



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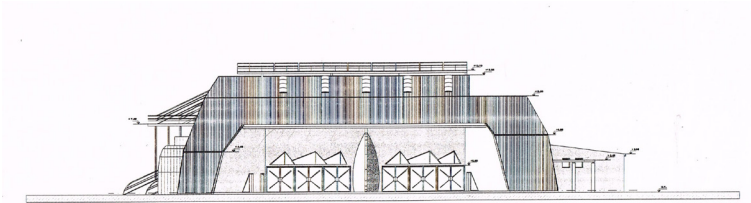
[1, 6] Plan and section sketch studies by Clorindo Testa

[2] Campus' masterplan

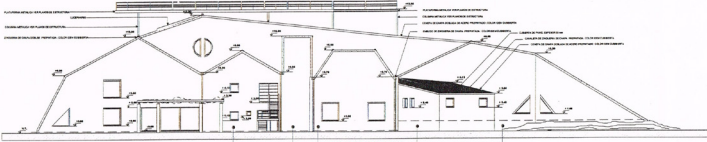
[3, 7] Exterior views

[4] Front and side elevations

[5] Auditorium's floor plan

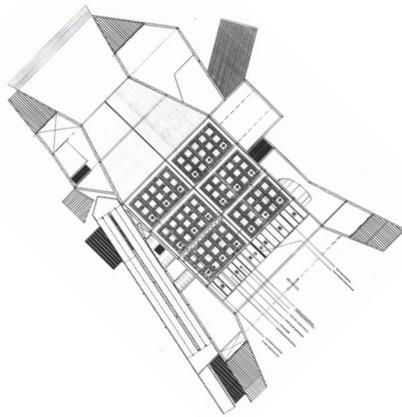


VISTA ESTE

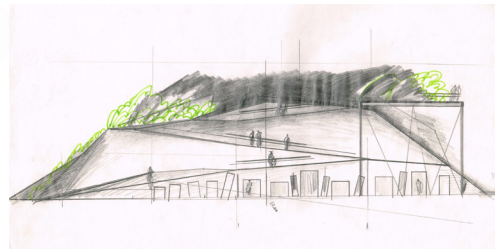
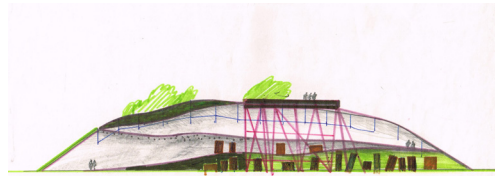


VISTA NORTE

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The auditorium's program called for a hall for six hundred people that could be not only used for lectures but also as a venue for cultural and sports activities. For this reason, the hall was conceived as a flexible and easily convertible space able to accommodate diverse audience configurations thanks to combining a flat section with removable seating, and a two-section tiered platform. Occupying the central portion of the auditorium's volume, the audience hall is flanked by classrooms and other areas used for diverse teaching purposes.

8

Individual Houses

Residence Guido di Tella, Buenos Aires (Argentina), 1975

Casa Capotesta, Pinamar (Argentina), 1985-1987

with Luis Hevia Paul and Irene van der Pol

Casa “La Tumbona,” Ostende (Argentina), 1985-1987

with Juan Genoud and Elena Acquarone

House for Mrs. R, Exaltación de la Cruz, 1998-2000

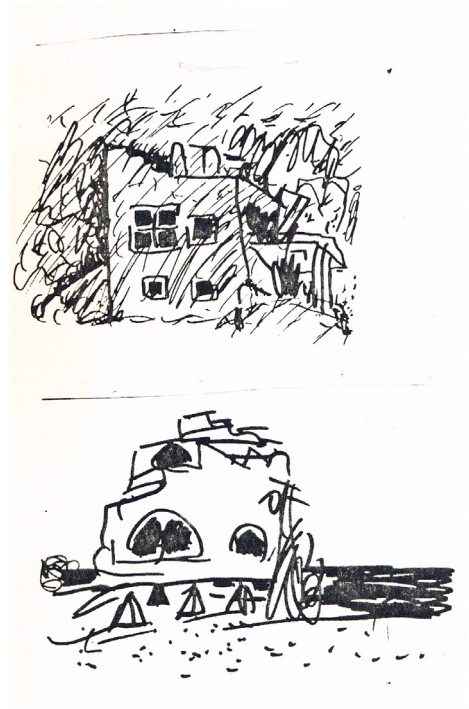
with Juan Fontana

In addition to the large volume of institutional buildings and projects, Testa designed numerous buildings for residential purposes, both multi-family buildings and individual houses. The high-rise apartment complexes on Rodríguez Peña Street and Castex Street (both in Buenos Aires, designed in the mid-1970s and not featured in this exhibit) are the most salient among multi-family high-rise buildings designed by Testa.



On the other hand, individual houses constitute a universe of its own within the architect's work, from the surprisingly secluded and spatially complex Residencia Guido di Tella, where a series of intimate and quasi surreal spaces are organized around two patios, to the beach houses of the 1980s and the almost rural House for Mrs. R in Exaltación de la Cruz, a small town one-hundred kilometers to the northwest of Buenos Aires.

Every single one of them is singular and unique; they reflect Testa's close attention to site constraints—or better yet, site opportunities—as well as his inclination to construct architectural promenades (perhaps a sign of his debt to Le Corbusier) that orient the gaze and the bodily occupation of space to and through a spatial journey that leads to carefully conceived spaces with intentionally framed views, be the interior courtyards of the di Tella residence, or the relationship with the Atlantic Ocean in the beach houses.





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[1-3] Residence Guido di Tella: interiors: living/ fireplace, patio, library.

[4-6] Casa "La Tombona": sketch, and two exterior views.



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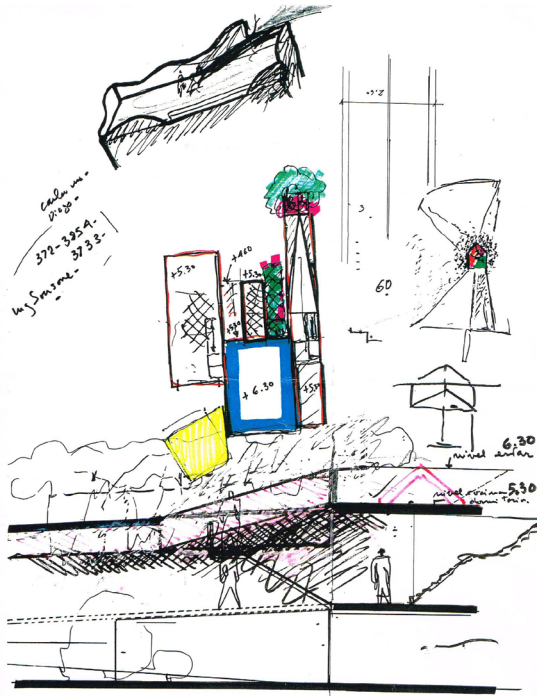
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[1-3] House for Mrs. R.: sketch study, interior ramp and street view.

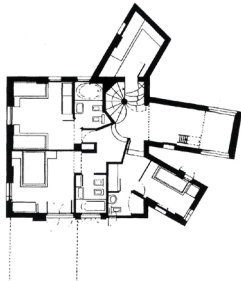
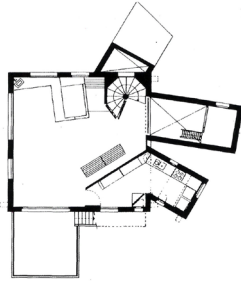
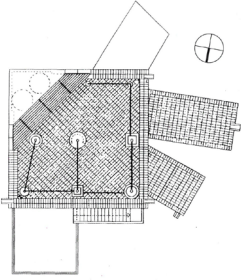
[4-10] Casa Capotesta: sketch, plans, exterior and interiors.



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Clorindo Testa, painter

In parallel to his successful architectural practice, Clorindo Testa maintained, throughout his professional life, a prolific career as a painter and sculptor artist, being considered as a one of the most relevant exponents of contemporary painting and sculpture in Argentina and Latin America.

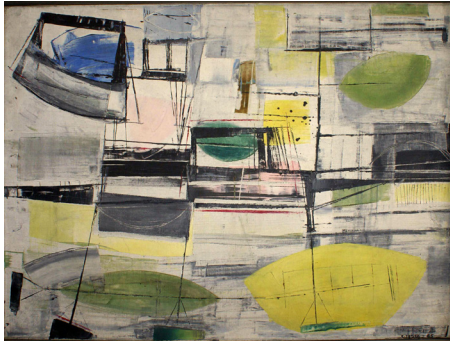
Not unlike his architectural production, his artwork reflects his constant experimentation with different media, supports and expressive languages. In his plastic work he embraced figurative and abstract themes, and developed numerous thematic series with narrative overtones focusing on a wide range of topics related to his personal interpretation of historic episodes, social and political issues, and architectural/urbanistic principles.

[1] *Untitled*, oil on canvas, 1954

[2] *Cenizas sobre Herculano y la curiosidad mata a Plinio*, acrylic on canvas, 1996

[3, 5, 6] Three fragments of *Habitar, Trabajar, Circular y Recrearse*, spray paint on paper and Board, 1969-1973

[4] *Untitled*, oil on canvas, 1960





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[1] *Siete cuadrados azules*, acrylic on canvas, 2011

[2] *Números, letras y manchas negra*, acrylic on canvas, 2007

[3] Three fragments of *Habitar, Trabajar, Circular y Recrearse*, spray paint on paper and Board, 1969-1973

[4] *Primavera*, acrylic on canvas, 1987

[5] *Autoretrato con la Peste o con Caperucita Roja*, acrylic on canvas, 1990

[6] *La ciudad de Stabia-Plinio y el Vesuvio*, acrylic on canvas, 1996

Clorindo Testa's sketch study for the Centro Cultural García Lorca project



Cherubino Gambardella

Secrets and lies about Clorindo Testa

I will say things that are only part of my autobiography, of my most un-confessable dreams, of the subtle pleasure of observing how a great architect born in my city –Naples— was able to transform his existence into wanderies built and designed in Argentina while remaining both Italian and South American at the same time, seduced by the pampas and all the architecture of the world, reuniting it, at his own leisure, in the impossible journey of a long existence.

I was much more afraid of him, that is why I like to tell my story through the idea I got of him by seeing images and studying his floorplans, amazed in front of his architecture elevations and deciding to represent him and represent myself through this text full of betrayals and lies that take my love for the plausible to a psychoanalytical limit in a process of self-liberation that, at the age of sixty-two, I like to be able to do with no other concern than that of a selfish and sought-after pleasure.

Everything that happens south of the Equator always reminds me of the Mediterranean.

The most credible explanation is probably because of the Spanish armies that made their way from the Inland Sea to South America, exporting terror but also a sense of singular constructive polyphony characteristic of the picturesque in the face of the unknown.

¹ (editor's note)
Refers to the
Mediterranean Sea.

The story I here tell begins in an incredible way. A wealthy medical doctor of Italian origin, Giovannandrea Testa, conceived a son in Buenos Aires but wanted him to be born in Italy at all costs, more precisely in Ceppaloni, a town in the Benevento area where he was originally from. For this reason, he had his young wife embark on a steamer bound from Latin America to Naples, so that the newborn child could have it written in the passport that he or she had been born in Europe, near the Neapolitan city.

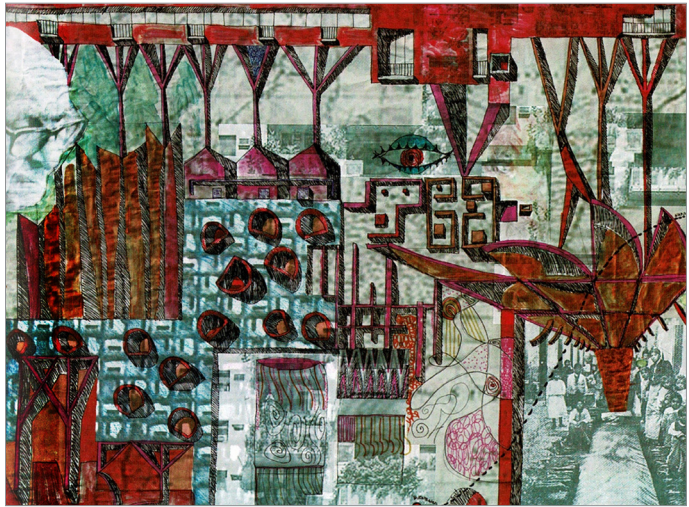
Thus, Clorindo Testa –for this is the name given to the newborn baby— was born in Italy and precisely in Naples, in December of 1923.

According to his father's hopes, he is destined to become a medical doctor to continue the family tradition. At forty days old he returns by ship to Argentina where he grows up. He studied electromechanical engineering for a short time because he was passionate of ships and wishes to eventually enroll in the school of naval design.

However, a twist of fate led him to enroll in the School of Architecture at the University of Buenos Aires, where he became an architect in 1948.

That was an important year because –according to those who have closely studied his work– Clorindo traveled around Europe and became culturally closer to Ernesto Nathan Rogers, while also being influenced by the figurative vastness of Le Corbusier, as it was the case of some of his most eminent South American colleagues who also followed the Swiss French master.

[1] Clorindo Testa
seen by Cherubino
Gambardella.
Learning a language.
(courtesy © Cherubino
Gambardella)



Taking into account the passion and inclination that Le Corbusier demonstrated for South America, this conceptual moment of closeness to “Corbu” is not a casual coincidence.

Certainly, Clorindo takes something important and indirect from Le Corbusier, something that does not lead him to the wonderful and famous roads of some of his older fellow-countrymen, but something that helps him climb along a path full of not only breathtaking views but also bumps and precipices.

² (editor’s note)
Victoria Ocampo
was an avant-garde
Argentinean writer
who was also
member of the
association that
invited Le Corbusier
to lecture in Buenos
Aires as well as one
of the architect’s
most conspicuous
hosts.

In 1929, when perhaps because a slowdown in commissions or perhaps in search of procuring new ones, the 42-year-old Swiss-French architect --already famous and about to finish the Villa Savoye— resumed his endless journey of international travel and, accepting an invitation from Victoria Ocampo,² embarked on an ocean liner heading to Buenos Aires, the Italian-born was only six years old.

Thus, more than presumably, at that early age of his life he does not care about Le Corbusier nor knows who he is and, therefore, the story could end here.

That almost decisive journey of 1929 was the first of Le Corbusier's eight trips to South America, one that would be the prelude of his immense fame and would be followed a few years later, in 1936, when invited by Brazil's government he collaborated with eventually key figures of Brazilian and South American architecture such as Lucio Costa and Oscar Niemeyer. A trip that, as it was characteristic of Le Corbusier, was rich in ideas, books, conferences and polemics, and would be eventually sealed by a small and very famous house for an Argentinean surgeon of which we will speak later.

Le Corbusier stayed in Buenos Aires for a long time, lecturing and sketching out a non-solicited masterplan for the city; he fled to the interior of the continent with famous travel companions and experienced aviators, and traveled by ship to Rio de Janeiro where he met or maybe met again with Josephine Baker, perhaps falling in love with her more than he should have.

And then, before returning to his homeland, he drafted and dreamt with miles and miles of inhabited viaducts for the South American cities he had visited.³

The story of Le Corbusier's relationship with South America begins with his second trip to Rio de Janeiro in 1936, where Oscar Niemeyer, Affonso Reidy and Lucio Costa awaited him like a god, a time in which he had already transformed his treatment of concrete as if it were a sculptural material."

³ (editor's note)
Refers to the Sketch urban proposals for Buenos Aires, Montevideo, Sao Paulo and Rio de Janeiro that Le Corbusier made during his first trip to South America in 1929.

⁴ (editor's note)
Refers to the Villa
Stein-de Monzie,
designed by Le
Corbusier and Pierre
Jeanneret in and
built in Garches-
Vaucresson in 1928.

The villa at Garches⁴ was already a distant reference, while the Swiss Pavilion at the Cité Universitaire in Paris loomed preemptorily towards a season of ductility that would slowly influence the work of many architects and materialize in the perfect plasticism of Amancio Williams. The latter, Williams, had a significant role in the only house designed by Le Corbusier that was built without the master ever seeing the site nor being involved in the building process: the residence for Dr. Curutchet, in La Plata.

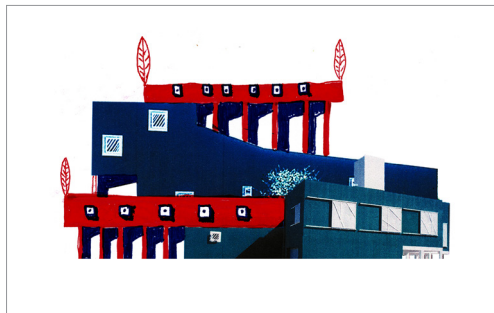
The construction work was instead directed by Williams. Singularly, the shape of the regular lot is divided into two bodies connected by a ramp and a patio. The play on the elevations becomes a bare frame anticipated by a recessed structure.

It is the late 1940s and this house speaks of the shadow machines that anticipate Le Corbusier's response to intense sunlight with his work India.

It is an obvious case of carving, sculpting, plasticism and architecture.

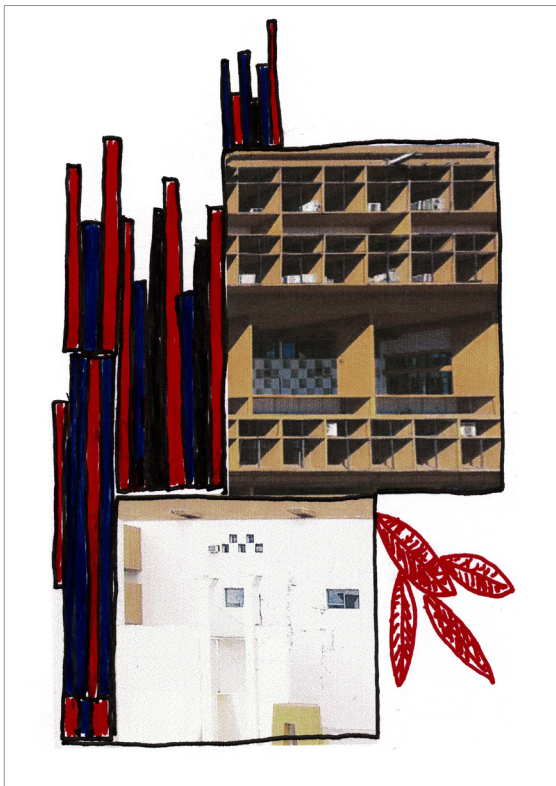
These qualities will remain alive in the mind of young Clorindo Testa who will start a solitary and erratic play with harmony and disharmony, the Mediterranean myth and rocky irony.

[2] Clorindo Testa
seen by Cherubino
Gambardella.
*Fantasies about
Clorindo Testa.*
(courtesy © Cherubino
Gambardella)



As I previously stated, the Mediterranean arrives in Argentina and Clorindo introduces it into his vocabulary thanks to the imperfections that will make him explore, from his earliest works and throughout a long career, its most singular declinations, building etymologies where the silence of the pampas is reflected in the roar of a language spoken by formal artifices skillfully developed to the point of virtuosity.

In his work we find the influence of Le Corbusier, but also of brutalism, color densely mixed with irony, in years when entering architecture was a step that had many conceptual doors also quite undefined, labile.



[3] Clorindo Testa
seen by Cherubino
Gambardella.
*Santa Rosa Civic
Center.* (courtesy
© Cherubino
Gambardella)

⁵ (editor's note)
Refers to Le
Corbusier's Unité
d'Habitation in
Marseille, built in
1946-1952.

I admire this man who enters architecture through the door of form, also following Corbu through painting as a parallel instrument of his art of building.

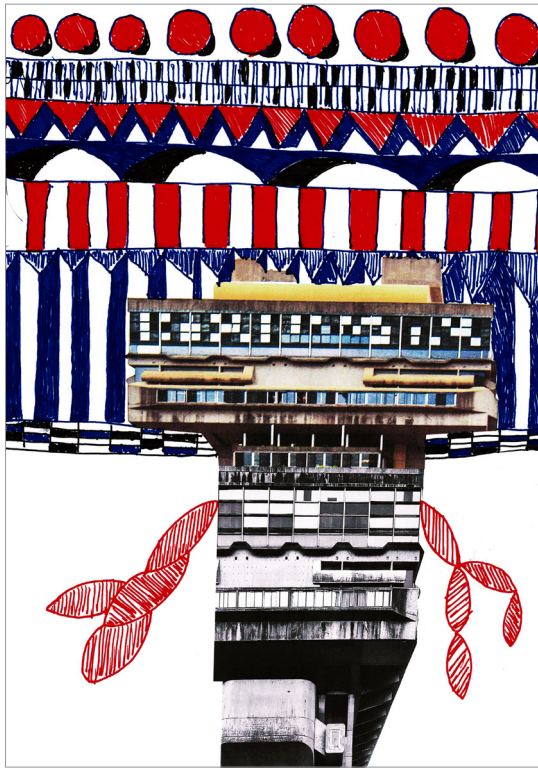
Testa has no inhibitions, he is completely free, capable of plundering vocabularies without allowing himself the grid-lock of an apparent rigor.

Further, in plundering these vocabularies, he does it with class, with an excess that does not determine a predictable result, but one that regenerates the acceptance and replication of every possible error in a series of bodies composed by writing one piece on top of another an infinite number of times, like when a child writes, deletes and in the place where he puts the mark above the deleted words there still remains the trace of the previous ones.

It is striking to see that at the Santa Rosa Civic Center built in 1956, the ability to build a continuous play between equivocal syntaxes and composite elements reveals a study of the Unité d'Habitation in Marseilles⁵ that becomes an interplay of a long facade, and large objects placed on the roof.

It is partly a ruin made by ramps, partly a collection of structures in a cage that never seems to be complete, not even in the large ramp nor in the front façade, barely outlined as something that exists and does not exist, or in the counterpart assailed by volumes that give it a smiling spectrality.

The mask is ready and is soon put into action in the solid and perforated marquee of the Bank of London, where interior and exterior dialogue without mixing surfaces, but also with the plastic force of concrete.



[4] Clorindo Testa
seen by Cherubino
Gambardella.
National Library.
(courtesy © Cherubino
Gambardella)

Here it defies gravity from above by taking on the syntactic plane of the ceiling, a plane forgotten in the Baroque and perhaps only recovered in some experiments of Neoclassicism to become a place of mechanical decoration.

It becomes an expressive surface of this historical moment.

Testa brings it to life by adding a rigid slab that tapers from below, forming up to seven different fronts in a virtual square that empties the corner of a block.

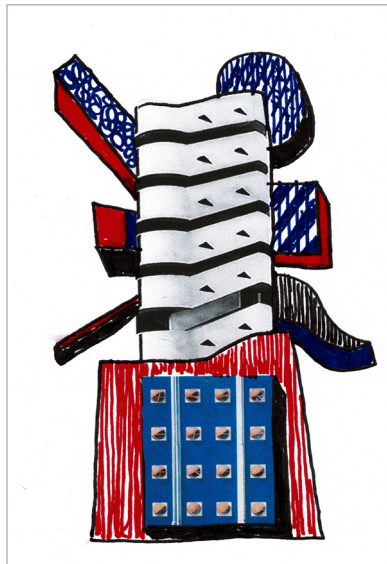
It is the moment to summon up a thousand layers and sculpt them everywhere, like the shell

⁶ (editor's note)
Refers to Milan's
famous tower
designed by BBPR
studio (completed in
1958).

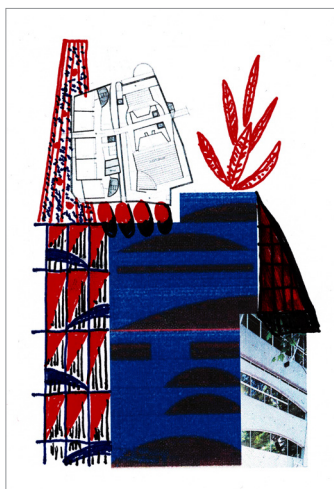
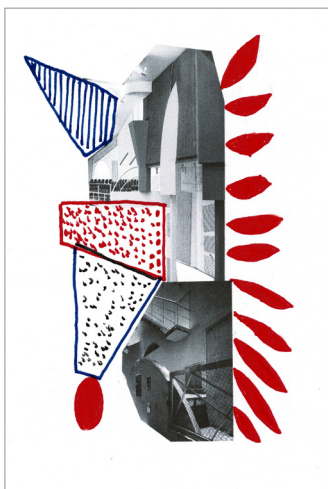
of a crustacean. We are now in the incredibly powerful cascade of styles of the National Library. Something very powerful, where the mass element is so strong that it cancels out the effect of a roof on the outside of the floor levels.

It is so important that it fills the empty base, dissolves the intermediate structure and creates a coronation that is a real metropolis. It is a flying city with a whole series of suspended elements. It's only a few years after the Torre Velasca⁶ and this architect is carrying out an operation that tends to never end, to narrate places, to write a letter in which the narrative almost stumbles, without falling even when it ends.

Leaving concrete behind, we now focus on the spherical eyes of the Naval Hospital where even the short facade thickens in a spectacular open staircase like a body added to the beautiful blue prism that leads the openings to eyesight.



[5] Clorindo Testa
seen by Cherubino
Gambardella.
Naval Hospital.
(courtesy © Cherubino
Gambardella)



[6,7] Clorindo Testa
seen by Cherubino
Gambardella.
left: Auditorio La Paz.
right: College of
Notaries and San
Basilio. (courtesy
© Cherubino
Gambardella)

It is a playfulness that returns in the free and overlapping forms of the Auditorio de La Paz, which, as all the auditoriums designed by Testa –such as of the College of Notaries or the unbuilt spectacular headquarters for the IUAV in San Basilio— it is a multistorey spatial hall. These architectures are true manifestos of a polyphony that leads him towards a luxurious and disturbing irony.

This manifested itself in a constant desire to treat the central space with columns and praetorian figures, sentries and guards, staircases, ramps and openings with lowered arches, within a fiercely mixed and meandering composition, as in all the houses he designed till the end of his career or in the formidable Argentine Pavilion at the Biennale di Venezia.

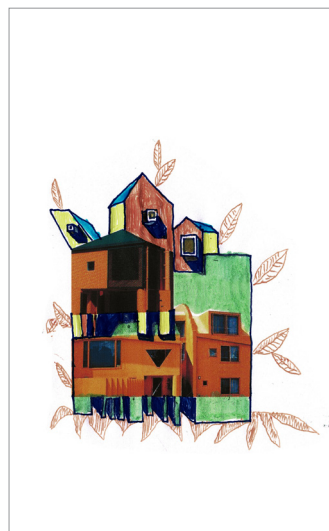
These are his great forms.

However, to illustrate this odd text, I need to accumulate more tension almost as if we need to reach an expressive tuning fork. To that end I will speak about his houses.

[8, 9] Clorindo Testa
seen by Cherubino
Gambardella.

left: *Casa La
Tumbona*.

right: *Casa Amarilla*.
(courtesy © Cherubino
Gambardella)

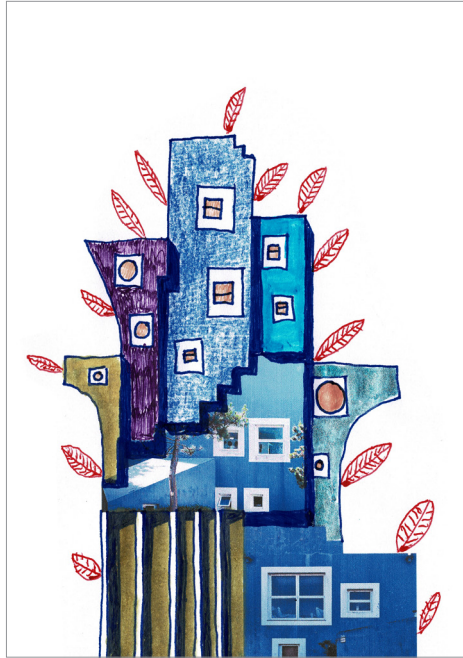


Let's start with *Casa La Tumbona* where the square is crossed by a forty-five-degree directrix that deforms in its projection behind the staircase, and then the wonderful yellow *Casa Amarilla*, made of constantly winding volumes reunited by an elevation where a promenade architecturale unfolds at the rooftop.

Here everything is paratactic: there are at least five architectures that torture each other in a wonderful sadistic game of fragments and ruins put together by accessory bodies.

Let's continue with the *Casa Capotesta*, built in 1983, where the volumes and the staircase unfold like an ironic magnet from a square base with high knurls and blue paint, while the square windows are fixed and highlighted by white paint.

The *Casa Verde* is sumptuous and elongated, both in the spectacular triumph of the ramp and in the planimetric dominance of the square, constantly



[10] Clorindo Testa
seen by Cherubino
Gambardella.
Casa Capotesta.
(courtesy © Cherubino
Gambardella)

challenged by the elevation and the marvelous sliding shutters.

Casa Blanca is simply a masterpiece. From the central body grows an incredible village where every window has a slanted frame while the “hut” director lines push you everywhere like the petals of a white flower.

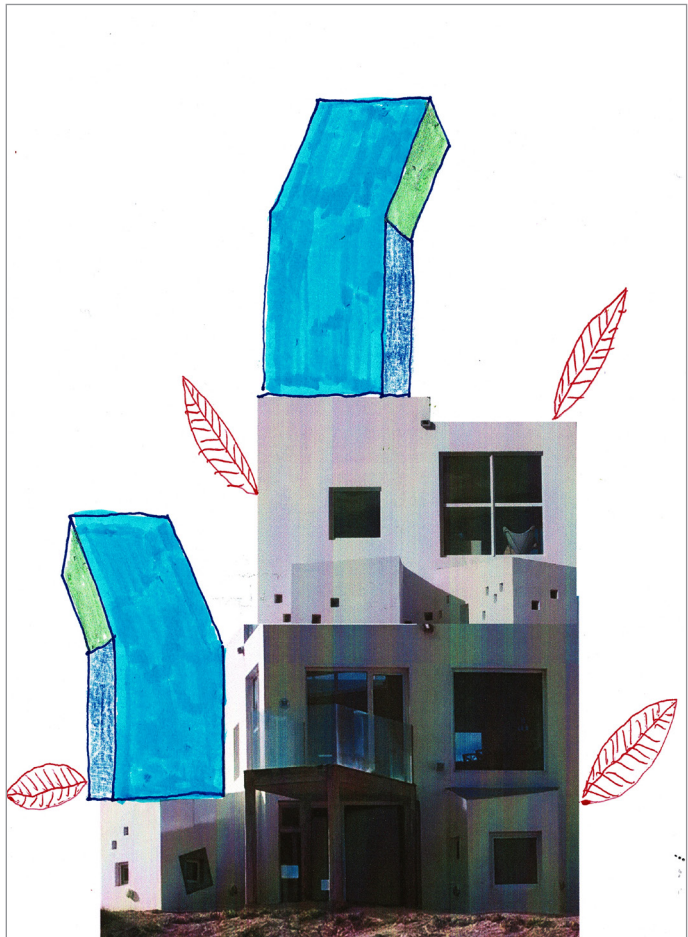
Wonderful evidences that are finally materialized in *Casa Prontopria*, which, located a few meters from the Ocean, seems ready to welcome it back to the Mediterranean.

The secret is in the gaze.

Then, when you look at these architectures, you make them your own at the moment in which you put a load of lies on them to appropriate them.

Clorindo Testa, from the Paradise of Architects, will forgive me if I have tried to take him for a ride on my personal rollercoaster.

I did it because this is the only way I can say something of what I feel for him and for myself, and above all because I now believe that the fundamental problem is to relate to sacred texts, reading and rereading them, designing and redesigning them until experiencing the subtle pleasure of betrayal.



[11] Clorindo Testa
seen by Cherubino
Gambardella.
Casa Prontopria.
(courtesy © Cherubino
Gambardella)

Gerardo Caballero

If the Idea Doesn't Die, the Project Doesn't Come to Life

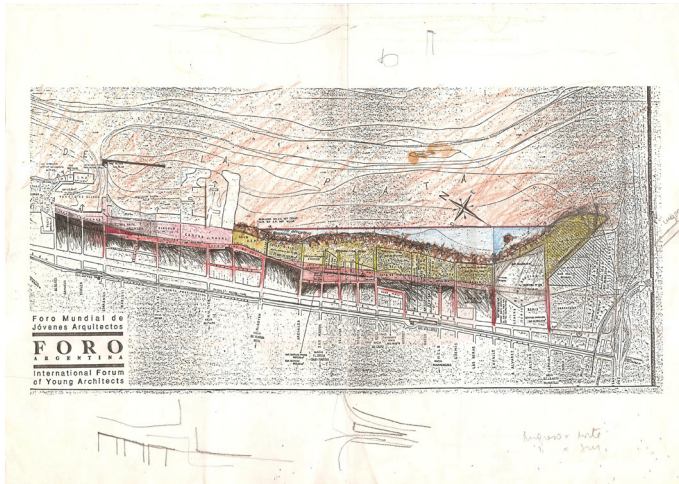
In 1991, along with Rafael Iglesia and Gonzalo Sánchez Hermelo, we participated in an event at the Buenos Aires Biennial known as the International Forum of Young Architects in which 40 Argentine architects and 40 international architects gathered. Teams were formed to develop an urban landscape proposal that included public pools on the coast of Vicente López along the Río de la Plata. This workshop spanned five days, from Monday to Friday.

From the beginning, we refused to conceive of what is commonly understood as “a pool.” Instead, we began exploring innovative alternatives.

However, the first two days passed without us arriving at any solution; we produced no models, nor plans or sketches, only mental reflections. A certain anxiety began to surface.

It was only on the third day, Wednesday, that the idea came to us like a revelation: to create an 800-meter-long line in the water, a concrete wall 30 centimeters thick that, along with the sinuous coastline, would define the future pool.

The only drawing we made was a plan on a photocopy of the project site, where a black line separated the brown water of the river from the blue, crystal-clear water of our pool. That simple drawing encapsulated the essence of



[1] G. Caballero, R. Iglesia, and G. Sánchez Hermelo: proposal for public pools on the coast of Vicente López along the Río de la Plata. Forum of Young Architects, Buenos Aires, 1991. (courtesy © Gerardo Caballero)

our proposal, a perfect synthesis that solved the required program with a single constructive gesture.[1]

On Thursday, the organizers informed us that renowned Argentinean architect Clorindo Testa would visit the workshop to review the projects and offer feedback.

Personally, I was very excited, both because of the deep admiration I felt for Clorindo and also because we had a promising project to present to him. I imagined that upon seeing our drawing, he would congratulate us and perhaps even offer us jobs at his studio.

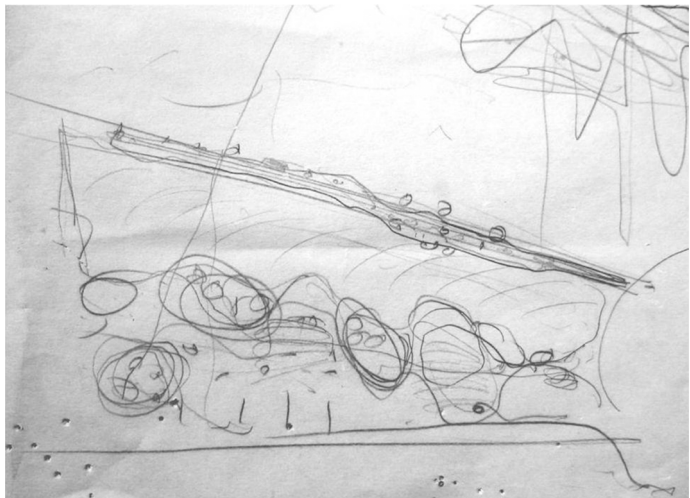
The next morning, we were ready to show him our proposal. Clorindo sat down in front of our drawing and greeted us kindly. We briefly explained our idea, which didn't require many words. However, I noticed that he didn't seem impressed. He stared at the drawing in silence and, after a while, took a pencil and started drawing. As he sketched, he suggested alternatives: "If this wall were folded, it

would work better structurally to resist the water's pressure, and it could be a bit thinner." Just like that, our perfectly straight wall became a zigzag. He added that this wall could support a platform, a sort of artificial beach that, in his drawing, took on an irregular shape, allowing people to walk on it, bring umbrellas and chairs, and even sit and eat while looking at the river. The circles that appeared in his sketch were, according to him, sandboxes.[2]

Our abstract and minimalist work was being "ruined" before our eyes. Clorindo continued suggesting stairs so people could arrive by boat, and slides for people to enter the pool, all scribbled in shapes and lines that overlapped, spoiling the purity of our beautiful line. We remained silent, feeling disappointed; he had not understood our proposal nor appreciated our idea. It was a huge letdown.

On the day of the final presentation, without accepting any of his suggestions, we showed our single drawing, which synthesized the entire

[2] Sketch by Clorindo Testa commenting Caballero/Iglesia/Sánchez Hermelo's proposal at the Forum of Young Architects, Buenos Aires, 1991. (courtesy © Gerardo Caballero)



intervention. Nonetheless, I kept Clorindo's sketch as a memory of his critique.

Four or five years passed that episode, during an informal conversation about architecture in Barcelona with Alfons Soldevila and Albert Viaplana, while traveling in Alfons' Suzuki Samurai, Albert said to me, "You know what happens? If the idea doesn't die, the project doesn't come to life."

Immediately, Clorindo's critique came to mind; his comments, which we had not understood at the time, now made sense. Our proposal was just an idea, and we, enamored with it, were not allowing the project to emerge.

Clorindo, on the other hand, had begun to give life to that idea, complexifying it by confronting all the constraints that cause friction with reality: construction, materials, structures, topography, water, tides, usage, and people. He turned that journey from the abstract to the concrete—a journey we had stubbornly refused to take—he turned the idea into a project.

It was a memorable lesson in architecture from Clorindo Testa, a great master.

Mario Corea

About Clorindo Testa

If I had to name the architects who most influenced my professional career, I would not hesitate to name Josep Lluís Sert and Fumihiko Maki because of my training at the Harvard University Graduate School of Design (GSD) and, of course, Clorindo Testa.

My first encounter with Clorindo was when he nominated me to study at the Architectural Association School of Architecture (AA) in London in 1969, more than 50 years ago. However, this personal encounter with him was so significant that it's still fresh in my memory. At that time Clorindo was one of the most important architects in Argentina. His two most emblematic works – the Bank of London and the National Library– both in Buenos Aires, were, and still are, key works in the architectural panorama of Argentina.

For me, the Bank of London in Buenos Aires is a master class in architecture for various reasons, fundamentally because of its urban proposal and the location of the entrance

The facade generates a triple height threshold, so we are simultaneously in the city and in the bank's interior.

The placement of the entrance on the corner of the site is the most important point of the building, which then develops in two directions along the Reconquista and Bartolomé Mitre streets. As we look at the building, it's clear that there is no other place to put the entrance.

The structural proposal is also singular, with the facades forming a megastructure from which the three upper floors hang. Independently of these, the four central column trays of the first and second floors float above the first floor, which is articulated by a three-level central hall. Below these there are three service basements with an area where customers can enter with their vehicles to carry out their transactions.

Finally, above the main structure of the bank, in a smaller volume on a single level, is the staff's lounge and the social club.

This work, together with the National Library, is one of the most important examples of "Brutalism," which was introduced by Le Corbusier and was very important in my training as an architect both at the GSD and the AA. Located in Buenos Aires' Recoleta neighborhood in a city block bound by Austria, Agüero, and Libertador streets, this project was the result of winning the 1961 national competition, that is, it was designed at the same time as the Bank of London.

Both are examples of the capacity for expression that the structure and, mainly, the articulation of the section can provide. They express all the activities that take place inside the buildings in a singular and sculptural way.

In 2006, Clorindo's National Library was essential for me when my office was engaged in the competition for the Sant Joan de Deu University Hospital in Reus, Catalonia. The brief was for a hospital of 100,000 m² with different volumes, both in section and in plan. Almost 30 years after visiting it, the National Library in Buenos Aires became a

conceptual reference to approach the design of the project. We won the competition, and the hospital is now built and has been in use since 2010.

On another note, upon my return from London, and under the influence of Clorindo, I began to paint at the age of 31. I continue doing this today. This has provided me with a form of expression freed from all the constraints of the building process, which I thoroughly enjoy.

In 2013, a month before his death, I visited Clorindo again at his home in Buenos Aires. We talked a lot about life, architecture, and painting. During that visit, I acquired a triptych of three of his small paintings that I cherish with great affection and that remind me of him every day.

I am very happy and humbled to be able to participate in the celebration of the centenary of Clorindo Testa, an Argentinian and universal architect and artist whose works stand as a testament to the power of his creative genius to transform our everyday lives.

Joaquina Testa

My father: an architect, an artist, a teacher

My father's work and life are inextricably linked to his birth in Italy on December 10th, 1923. Years before, his own father, a Neapolitan medical doctor, had emigrated to Argentina, "the land of the future", as his uncle had told him. Later, when my grandmother got pregnant, he decided that he wanted his first child to be born in his country of origin, so they boarded a transatlantic ship bound for Naples. They came back when my father was three months old, and then returned five years later. From that second trip, he brought back a deep connection to Italy and the region of Ceppaloni, a collection of drawings – which included those of his family home, his father's car and a transatlantic – and the imprint on his brain of shapes easily recognized throughout his work, both as an artist and as an architect.[1]

All the same, Buenos Aires was his home.



[1] Drawing by Clorindo Testa at the age of 4 years old, 1928. (courtesy © Fundación Clorindo Testa)



[2] *Pensión de Sevilla*, c. 1950.
(courtesy © Fundación Clorindo Testa)

His vocation was a slow discovery: he started naval engineering and moved on to civil engineering, only to end up in architecture. After graduation he spent two years in Italy, also visiting Spain. It was there that he sketched what he considered his first production as an artist: a guesthouse room in Seville.[2]

Back in Argentina, he got a job in city planning, won his first architecture competition (Argentine Construction Chamber, 1951, with Gaido, Rossi and Dabinovic, had his first solo exhibition at van Riel Art Gallery (1952) and never stopped, literally.

Above anything, my father loved to work. He enjoyed his routine of going to the office every morning and every afternoon (after lunch and an unmissable nap), Monday to Friday. He spent Saturday mornings with his canvases and oil or acrylic paints, and at midday he stopped painting and went to Florida Street¹ to see some exhibitions, or met my mother and some friends at a cocktail

¹ Lively street in downtown Buenos Aires, full of people, shops, art galleries and cultural centers.

² Traditional five-star hotel in Buenos Aires, built in 1909. Now closed for renovations.

bar –sometimes The Plaza,² sometimes the Pink Gin – where he usually had a Negroni. The next step was home, where we had pasta for lunch. Every Saturday evening, we had dinner out, and every Sunday, lunch with other friends. On Sunday evenings, instead, it was my father’s turn to creatively cook a sauce to accompany some dry pasta (with varying results...) to share with still other friends and any unexpected guests that happened to be in Buenos Aires.

His first drawings, from his years in Europe and back in Argentina, are made with ink on paper, and represent landscapes, cityscapes and constructions.[3] He then moved onto abstraction in a series of paintings in black and white.[4]

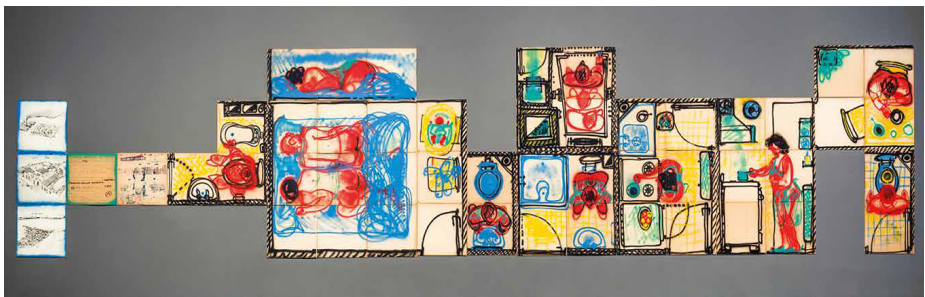
After these mostly abstract series, my father’s inspiration usually came from his readings, his curiosity about history and current events. For example, in the 70s, he used spray paint in a series of works that have a close connection with architecture, showing people in different everyday

[3, left] Two ink on paper drawings by Clorindo Testa. Above: *Puentes* (Bridges), 1952. Below: *La montaña rusa* (The rollercoaster), 1952. (courtesy © Fundación Clorindo Testa)

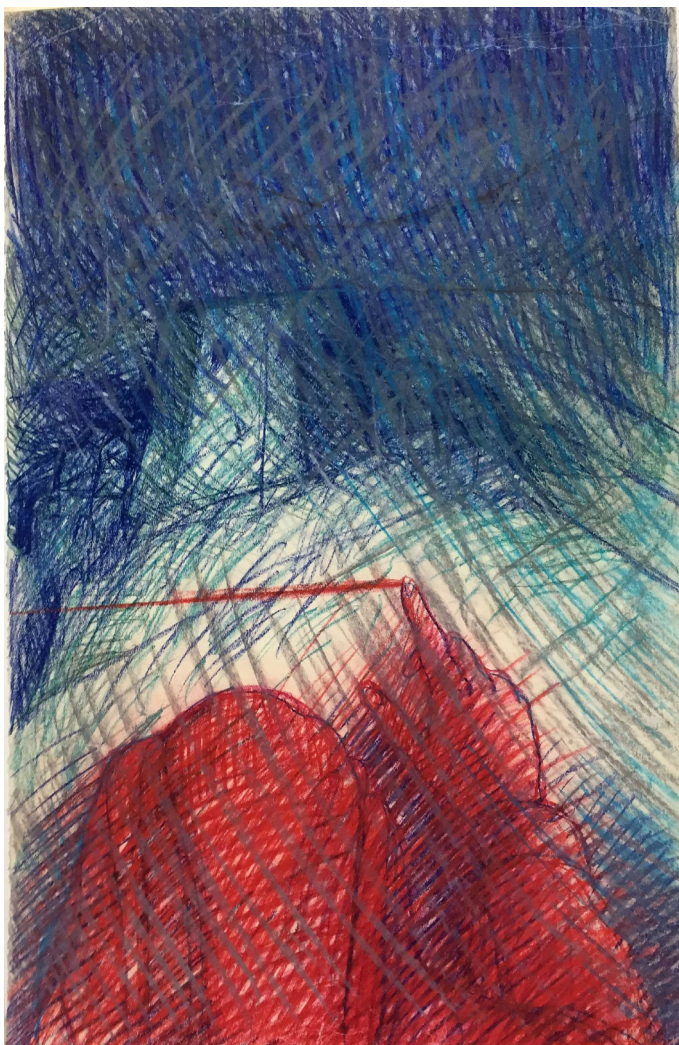


[4, right] *Untitled* (from “Compositions in black and white” series), c.1960, 70 x 50 cm, óleo sobre cartón. (courtesy © Fundación Clorindo Testa)





[5, above] *Habitar, trabajar, circular y recrearse (Living, Working, Circulating and Cultivating the mind and spirit)*, fragment. (courtesy © Fundación Clorindo Testa and Museum of Modern Art, New York)

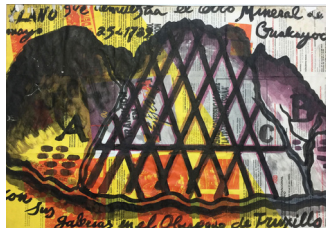


[6, left] *La peste señalando el castillo (The plague pointing to the castle)*; from the series "La peste en Ceppaloni," 1978. (courtesy © Fundación Clorindo Testa)

³ (editor's note)
Refers to the four functions of urbanism --living, working, circulation, and nurturing the body and the spirit—that were enunciated by Le Corbusier in the Athens Charter and became the basis of architectural and urbanistic principles promoted and promulgated by CIAM (Congrès Internationaux d'Architecture Moderne).

scenes, represented in plans and sections, reflecting on Le Corbusier's four functions of architecture and urbanism,³ and how, in my father's opinion, architecture was not serving people well enough.[5] Many of these series were inspired by historical or current events. The most relevant for his own history is The Plague in Ceppaloni, based on a book he was gifted while visiting relatives in Italy, and which listed the people in the region who had died from the plague in the XVII c. A red figure walks through the landscape and peeks into people's homes, giving them the plague.[6] Other series depict incidents that took place in Buenos Aires during the Spanish conquest, or comment on the Codex Trujillo del Perú, to which he added some "missing pages"[7] and the cloning of "Dolly", the sheep.[8]

[7, above] left:
Plano que muestra el Cerro Gualcayoc, mayo 25 de 1789, from the series; undated.



right: *Láminas que faltaban en el inventario del Obispo Martínez. Compañía de Trujillo, 1989 (courtesy © Fundación Clorindo Testa)*



[8, below] *Soy el quinto (I'm the fifth), mixed media; from the series Las Clonaciones, 1998. (courtesy © Fundación Clorindo Testa)*



[9] *Número 3
Santa Fé (y Callao)*
(Number 3 Número 3
Santa Fé (at Callao),
2003; (courtesy ©
Fundación Clorindo
Testa)

The common thread is that they all contain a critical reflection on humans, their actions and how these affect all of us. In his later years, he focused on the “Amanzanamientos” or city blocks, showing grids that became progressively deformed, stained or blurred, again an observation on how people live.[9]

My father was a creative, free architect and artist, and at the same time a man of routines.

Finally, I would like to comment on a third activity that he performed (or fourth, if we include pasta-sauce maker!): he was a collector. I remember him visiting antiques dealers in Rome and town markets in Indonesia, buying masks and ships to add to his collections. These included wonderful examples of African masks from the 19th century as well as Indonesian or Guatemalan masks sold at small markets, and exquisite professional models of ships as well as small wooden boats made by local craftsmen.[10]

At the Clorindo Testa Foundation, we stress the fact that my father was a humanist, that everything he did had the human at its center: in art, in architecture and in his collections. He was an innovative architect, a prolific artist, a curious collector and a father who inspired me to enjoy work, art, architecture and travel. I feel truly grateful for all I learnt from him.[11]



[10, above] Clorindo Testa with his collection of masks. (courtesy © Fundación Clorindo Testa)

[11, below] Clorindo Testa and his daughter Joaquina. (courtesy Joaquina Testa)



Clorindo Testa: a succinct biography

Clorindo Testa was born near Naples, Italy, on December 10, 1923. His parents returned to Buenos Aires when he was a few months old. He resided in Argentina's capital for the rest of his life.

He grew up in Buenos Aires' traditional neighborhood of Recoleta, attending elementary school at the Montessori School and the Italian School. After completing high school at the Colegio Marista Champagnat, he enrolled in the schools of Naval Engineering and Civil Engineering, but that lasted a rather short time because he found his passion in Architecture. He studied architecture at the country's prestigious Universidad of Buenos Aires, where he graduated in 1947. The following year he won a scholarship for a three-month study trip to Europe, which eventually turned into a two-year journey.



[1] Clorindo Testa at the age of five or six, (courtesy © Fundación Clorindo Testa)



[2] Clorindo Testa and gallery owner Frans van Riel. (courtesy © Fundación Clorindo Testa)

Upon his return, he joined the Oficina del Plan Regulador de Buenos Aires, a municipal agency headed by Juan Ferrari Hardoy and inspired by the urbanistic ideas of Le Corbusier, the only architect whom Testa ever recognized as an influential figure in his architectural thinking.

In 1951 he joined the Urban Planning Department in the city of Buenos Aires. In that same year, together with Boris Dabinovic, Augusto Gaido, and Francisco Rossi, he won the competition to build the headquarters of the Cámara Argentina de la Construcción, his first built work.

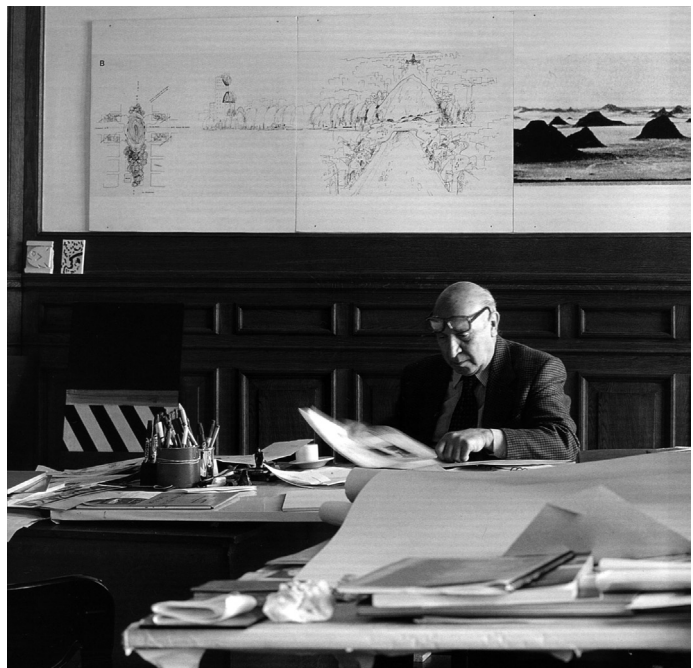
The year 1952 was pivotal in his career because he held his first solo exhibition at the van Riel Gallery, an event that marked the beginning of a double professional activity --art and architecture— that would continue throughout his life.

In 1962, he married Teresa Bortagaray; they spent their honeymoon in India and Europe. In fact, since then, he traveled to Europe every two or three years to see relatives and friends. In 1969 his daughter Joaquina was born.

Throughout his career, he designed public and private buildings, incorporating the distinctive characteristics of his architecture: the use of concrete, primary colors and pure forms.

Among his most outstanding buildings are the Bank of London and South America (today Banco Hipotecario Nacional) and Argentina's National Library. Both have been internationally praised since their conception and are considered paradigmatic works of Brutalist architecture in the region.

In the following decades, he carried out projects such as the Naval Hospital –which reflects his passion for ships— and other many other emblematic buildings of Buenos Aires' urban and cultural landscape such as the Cultural Center in Recoleta, the Paseo del Pilar, the auditorium of



[3] Clorindo Testa in his office/studio in Buenos Aires. (photograph courtesy © Daniela MacAdden)



[4] Two self-portraits by Clorindo Testa; *Autorretrato*, 1987 (left) and *Autorretrato*, 1984 (right). (courtesy © Fundación Clorindo Testa)

the Buddhist center Soka Gakkai, or the Museum of the Book. Many of his most important works of architecture are the result of having won the first prize in national and international architectural competitions.

His artistic production is inseparable from his architectural work: his entire oeuvre is marked by reflections on themes such as the city and urban living conditions. In 1957 he joined the Group of Seven Abstract Painters, later associated with *Boa Magazine*, and from 1958 he worked with the Group of Five.

In 1975 he became an organic member of the Group of 13 at the CAyC (Centro de Arte y Comunicación), with whom he exhibited regularly until 1994. Since then, his work has been exhibited regularly in galleries and museums throughout the country, both individually and in group exhibitions, and in national and international biennials. Among his most important series are *Composiciones en Blanco y Negro*, *La Peste en Ceppaloni*, *Mediciones*, *Gritos*, *Manzanas de Buenos Aires* and *Cuadrículas*.

His paintings and other art work are housed at numerous public and private collections, such as

the Museo de Arte Latinoamericano de Buenos Aires (MALBA), Buenos Aires, the Fondo Nacional de las Artes, the Museo Nacional de Bellas Artes de Buenos Aires and the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA), New York, USA.

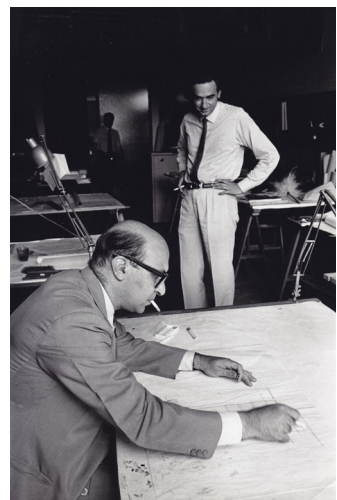
Architectural trajectory

When he returned from his stay in Europe in 1951, he worked in municipal agencies in Buenos Aires and, simultaneously, joined Francisco Rossi, David Gaido and Boris Dabinovic, with whom he worked until 1958. Working in team with the three of them, Testa carried out his first works major works, such as the Cámara Argentina de la Construcción in 1951 and the Centro Cívico de Santa Rosa in 1955.

In 1959 he was invited by SEPRA (a prestigious architectural firm led by Sánchez Elía, Peralta Ramos and Agostini) to participate in the competition for a monument to Batlle y Ordóñez in Montevideo, Uruguay, thus initiating a partnership and collaboration which most remarkable outcome was the emblematic Banco de Londres

[5, 6] left: exterior view of the Cámara Argentina de la Construcción (Buenos Aires, 1951-1963), Testa's first major built building.

right: Clorindo Testa and Francisco Bullrich. (courtesy © Fundación Clorindo Testa)



y de América del Sud (today Banco Hipotecario Nacional), designed in 1960.

In parallel to his work with SEPRA, he associated with Francisco Bullrich and Alicia Cazzaniga with whom he designed the Biblioteca Nacional – another emblematic building of Testa’s work and of Argentina’s architecture-- in 1962 and the year later the Instituto Di Tella.

He left SEPRA in 1970 to found his own studio in association with Héctor Lacarra, with whom he designed the Hospital Naval Central that same year. After Lacarra’s death in 1981, he never again had a permanent partner and, instead, worked in collaboration with colleagues, generally younger than him.

During the following years, he took part in numerous competitions with different architects associated with him depending on the project. Some of the most representative works of this period are the Centro Cultural Recoleta (1979) with Jacques Bedel and Luis Benedit, the Buenos Aires Design Center (1990) with Juan Genoud and Giselle Graci, the Auditorio de la Paz for the Buddhist organization Soka Gakkai Argentina (1996) with Eduardo Bompadre, the campus and Auditorium for



[7] Clorindo Testa with Juan Fontana and Oski Lorenti, who collaborated with Testa in the later part of his life. (courtesy © Fundación Clorindo Testa)

[8] Clorindo Testa at the retrospective exhibit of his work at the Museo Nacional de Bellas Artes, Buenos Aires, 1999. (courtesy © Fundación Clorindo Testa)



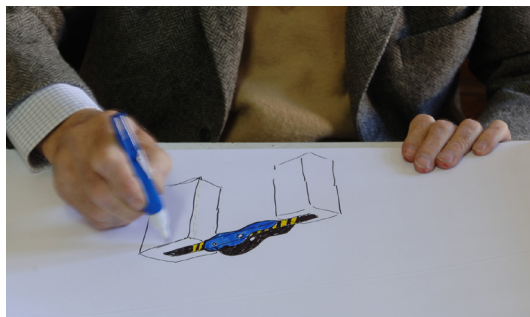
the Universidad del Salvador in Pilar (2000), and the Ciudad Cultural Konex (2003) with Juan Fontana and Oscar Lorenti.

A part of his architectural activity was devoted to the construction of private houses, both inside and outside the city limits of Buenos Aires. The most significant ones are the house for Guido di Tella (with Luis Hevia Paul and Irene van der Pol, 1968), Casa Capotesta in Pinamar (with Eduardo Bompadre, 1983-1985), and Casa 'La Tumbona,' (Ostende, 1986), to name only three.

All his architectural work, domestic and institutional, exhibits a very personal and identifiable yet unclassifiable style.

Clorindo Testa died in Buenos Aires at 89 years old on April 11, 2013.

[9] Clorindo Testa at work in his office/studio in Buenos Aires. (photograph courtesy © Daniela MacAdden)



Acknowledgments

Both the exhibition and publication of this little book dedicated to celebrating Clorindo Testa's architectural legacy are the result of a close collaboration between the Fundación Clorindo Testa, the Illinois School of Architecture (through its overseas study abroad program in Barcelona), and the Escola Tècnica Superior d'Arquitectura del Vallès (ETSAV).

As the originator and coordinator of the entire project I want to especially thank Joaquina Testa, President of the Fundación Clorindo Testa, for believing and supporting this initiative since its inception back in May 2023, and the Fundación's archivist, María D'Ambrosio, without whose archival knowledge of Testa's work, plus immense patience and help none of this would have been possible. Very special thanks to the Directors of the two schools, Pere Fuertes (ETSAV) and Francisco J. Rodríguez (Illinois School of Architecture) for precisely the same reasons, that is, believing and supporting the project from day one. All of us involved in this are indebted to many of our colleagues and collaborators. At the risk of forgetting some of them, I am grateful to Mercé Pascual, Diana Otero, and all the ETSAV's supporting staff, as well as to all the members of the Illinois Barcelona Program, including Program Coordinator Magalí Veronelli, all faculty, and participating students. All of them assisted in various aspects that led to the realization of this project.

Special thanks to all collaborators, including contributing authors and round table participants –Gerardo Caballero, Federica, Conte, Mario Corea, Pere Fuertes, Francisco J. Rodríguez, and Joaquina Testa— and Ezequiel Hillbert, author and producer of the video documentary entitled “Clorindo” of which an abridged preview version was projected during the exhibition. I am also very grateful to Federico Cairoli, Cemal Emden, Hans-Jürgen Commerell, and Daniela Mac Adden, four extraordinary architectural photographers who have graciously allowed us to reproduce their photographs of Testa's buildings in both this book and the exhibit.

I cannot thank enough Joaquina Testa for her review of English versions of texts from many contributing authors.

Finally, a special recognition to Paco Rodiel, head of Paco Teconart (Barcelona) –where exhibit and book were printed— for his advice, patience and understanding of our tight calendar of production and printing.

Alejandro Lapunzina

On behalf of the Fundación Clorindo Testa, Joaquina Testa wants to express her gratitude to the Illinois' Suzanne & William Allen Endowed Professorship (held by Alejandro Lapunzina), as well as to the schools –Illinois School of Architecture and ETSAV— who supported this initiative of producing an exhibition of her father's work, as well as to speakers and authors who participated in the book and opening round table. It is through these kinds of initiatives that Clorindo Testa's work will transcend, and new generations will get to know and be inspired by his work.

The Clorindo Testa Foundation in Buenos Aires, where you can learn about his life and work, is open to visitors by appointment.

Joaquina Testa [www.fundacionclorindotesta.org]

Contributing authors

Gerardo Caballero. Architect graduated at the Universidad Nacional de Rosario (Argentina) and Master of Architecture at Washington University in Saint Louis. He worked at the office of Corea-Gallardo-Mannino in Barcelona (1983-1985) and heads his own office in Rosario since 1988. He has taught extensively at prestigious institutions in the US, Europe and South America. His work has been published internationally and recognized with important awards such as Argentina's Architecture Award at the Buenos Aires International Architecture Biennale (2011) and First Prize for the Argentine Pavilion at the 17th International Architecture Exhibition at the Venice Biennale (2019).

Federica Conte. Architect and a PhD in Architecture and Construction at Sapienza University of Rome. Her doctoral research focuses on the work of the Italian-Argentine architect Clorindo Testa, a subject she has been investigating since 2021 in collaboration with Prof. Arch. Dina Nencini. She collaborates with several architectural offices in South Tyrol since 2023; more recently, along with partners M. Michieletto and Giona Carlotto, she has been commissioned to design buildings that are part of a large-scale development program at the island of Roatán in Honduras.

Mario Corea. Hon. FAIA, he graduated as an architect at the Universidad Nacional de Rosario (Argentina), Master of Architecture in Urban Design at Harvard Graduate School of Design, and Diploma in Urban Studies at the Architectural Association (London). He is principal of his own architectural office in Barcelona since 1976, and his work has been widely published internationally. He also taught extensively, notably at the ETSAV (1996-2007) and at many institutions in Europe, Latin America and the United States. He received many awards, including two Honoris Causa PhDs. He heads Barcelona's Laboratory for Hospital Design since 2015.

Pere Fuertes. Architect, Ph.D. in architecture and Associate Professor at the Vallès School of Architecture, ETSAV (Universitat Politècnica de Catalunya). Since 2021 he is Director of ETSAV and of the CRAL UPC Research Centre. His engagement in the Habitar Group provides him with an academic and research orientation focused on the re-inhabitation of the urban fabric and existing buildings as part of a strategy to develop a sustainable environment based on the reprogramming and adaptation of architecture to new paradigms of habitability. He has also written several articles on Le Corbusier. He currently serves as Director of ETSAV.

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Alejandro Lapunzina. Suzanne & William Allen Professor of Architecture at the Illinois School of Architecture (University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign). He is also Director of the Illinois Architecture Study Abroad Program at Barcelona-El Vallès of the same institution. An architect educated at the Universidad de Buenos Aires (Argentina) and Washington University in St. Louis (USA), he has written books, essays, and articles, as well as delivered lectures on a wide range of architectural themes such as the work Le Corbusier (with an emphasis on his work in the American continent), and diverse aspects of modern and contemporary architecture, and architectural pedagogy.

Francisco J. Rodríguez Suárez. Director of the University of Illinois School of Architecture at Urbana-Champaign and Clayton T. Miers Professor. He studied architecture at Georgia Tech, the Université de Paris and Harvard GSD, where he earned a Master of Architecture and numerous awards for his studies. Rodríguez-Suárez has taught and lectured at prestigious universities worldwide and was President of the United States’ Association of Collegiate Schools of Architecture (ACSA), an organization that had recognized his work with the prestigious ACSA Distinguished Professor award, which is just one of many awards and distinctions he received for his architectural work, research, teaching, and university administration.

Joaquina Testa. Joaquina is Clorindo Testa’s daughter. After a brief passage through the School of Architecture at the University of Buenos Aires, she studied to be an English teacher at a teacher training college in Buenos Aires; she later obtained a MA in Language Education at NILE, with the University of Chichester. In 1999, she participated in a museology seminar organized by Argentina’s National Endowment for the Arts, Guggenheim Museum and PROA. She has lived in several countries, including Indonesia, where she taught at Jakarta’s National Museum for four years. In 2014, Joaquina and her mother, Teresa Bortagaray, established the Clorindo Testa Foundation in the same space where her father worked as an architect and artist.

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Clorindo Testa's sketch study for an urban development in Puerto Madero





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