be credited for having assembled such a rich array of drawings, photographs, full-scale architectural fragments, plaster casts, and samples of decorative materials, like colored glass and marbrite, presented in an attractive and coherent way. The daring decision to invite two young contemporary artists to enter into dialogue with Lacoste’s architecture added to the reading of the work: Hans de Beeck’s intriguing model of the Beringen church enhanced the sense of mystique of this remarkable project, while the playful cartoon-like drawings and video of Emilio Lopez-Menchero introduced an awareness of the imaginary levels at stake in Lacoste’s passion for the past—uncovered and reimagined by his archaeological exploits—and in the architect’s fascination with non-Western civilizations.

For some years now, the AAM has been documenting Art Deco architecture in Belgium. Its attention to Lacoste, who is represented at the institution with an extremely rich archive, is therefore no surprise. Yet the presentation of this puzzling architect also neatly fits the mission that the AAM and in particular Maurice Culot, one of its founders, have set themselves since the very beginning: to write an alternative history of modern architecture in Belgium, in which various kinds of modernisms can be inscribed. It is telling that in the introduction of the exhibition, the practice and teaching of Lacoste was presented as “an alternative for the normative discourse of the avant-garde.” Yet, by focusing so explicitly on inventiveness in architectural form and decoration, and by only implicitly addressing functionality and construction, the Lacoste exhibition failed to fully exploit the architect’s oeuvre to make this case. Ground plans often highlighted decorative floor patterns rather than clarifying spatial qualities and, though a few striking photographs of construction sites were displayed, Lacoste’s ambiguous attitude toward tectonics was not raised as an issue. The African projects section was perhaps most revealing in this respect, for in putting up a confrontation between drawings of Africanizing Congo pavilions and real African artifacts, it almost exclusively aimed at illustrating Lacoste’s genuine interest in African culture. Yet the well-documented Congo pavilion at the 1931 Paris colonial exhibition, one of Lacoste’s most daring designs and a brilliant exercise in what Jean-Claude Vigato once described as “colonizing the vocabulary of exotic architecture through the architectural principles of the Ecole des Beaux-Arts,” could have been used to induce a more profound reading. This would have required, however, focusing also on its ingenious planimetric layout and drawing attention more explicitly to the fascinating structural solution of its cupolas, a prefabricated wooden framework, which was shown without comment in just a few photographs. Only then would the truly modern nature have been revealed of a project that, as a contemporary critic in L’Architecture d’Aujourd’hui wrote, “united the spirit of the colonial style with a formal logic resulting from functional demands.”

The presentation of an overwhelming number of meticulously executed and colorful drawings proved Lacoste’s talent as a draftsman and made this exhibition particularly attractive. Letting the work speak for itself, however, also led to the danger of seducing rather than informing the visitor. The exhibition would have benefited from more elaborate texts on individual projects, as these would have offered a means to open up the perspective on Lacoste’s work beyond the strict formal categories of Art Deco and to contextualize the work in relation to, for instance, its reception in professional as well as in popular media. No mention could be found of the telling controversy aroused by his Pavillon de la Vie Catholique at the Brussels World’s Fair of 1935, a building that was regarded by some as a “blasphemy” for its resemblance to a mosque. One would also have appreciated finding out something about the role of his clients, but perhaps such critiques will be found in the forthcoming monograph. If the exhibition should have acknowledged that even such a truly creative architect as Henry Lacoste operated in and was influenced by the specific economic, social, and cultural conditions of his time, it nonetheless had the undeniable merit of successfully bringing into the picture a striking personality of twentieth-century Belgian architecture, a designer who beyond doubt deserves international attention.

JOHAN LAGAE
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Publications related to the exhibition:

Notes

Gund Hall Gallery, Harvard Design School, Cambridge, Massachusetts 6 October–19 November 2003

Josep Lluís Sert: Architect to the Arts II
Sert Gallery, Carpenter Center, Harvard University Art Museums, Cambridge, Massachusetts 13 September–14 December 2003

Josep Lluís Sert (1902–1983) is among the remarkable number of architects and artists from Spain and in particular from Catalonia who have had a significant impact on modernism worldwide. Although he spent many years abroad, he remained close to his Catalan roots, returning to his native Barcelona in anticipation of his death. Having gradu-
ated from the Escuela Superior de Arquitectura there in 1929, as a young man he had worked with Le Corbusier in Paris and opened his own practice in Barcelona, where he organized a group of architects affiliated with the well-known modernist group, the Congrès Internationaux d’Architecture Moderne (CIAM).

In 1937, Sert’s allegiance to the Republican side in the Spanish Civil War led to his design of the pavilion for the Spanish Republic at the Paris World’s Fair. Its visibility and message were enhanced by its contents—Pablo Picasso’s mural Guernica and works by Alexander Calder, Julio González, and Joan Miró. His affinity for the visual arts and collaboration with artists, which would remain at the core of Sert’s architectural contributions, were the themes of the exhibition at the Carpenter Center under review.

After the fall of the Spanish Republic, Sert left Europe in 1939 and settled in New York, where he joined a vibrant circle of refugees. During this period, he made unsuccessful attempts to find a position on the faculty at Harvard University. To advance his possibilities for academic employment as well as to promote the CIAM agenda in the United States, he wrote Can Our Cities Survive? An ABC of Urban Problems, Their Analyses, Their Solutions: Based on the Proposals Formulated by CIAM (Cambridge, Mass., and London, 1942). At the same time, he formed a partnership with Paul Lester Wiener in the firm of Town Planning Associates, which specialized in Latin American commissions. The firm’s master plans for cities in Brazil, Colombia, Cuba, Peru, and Venezuela provided Sert with opportunities to apply as well as reconsider CIAM tenets and the ideas he had absorbed while associated with Le Corbusier.

Thus, Sert’s “American years” actually began in Latin America, not long after Le Corbusier’s appearance there in 1929. Work in the southern continent modified Sert’s position vis-à-vis CIAM and Le Corbusier, foreshadowing trends he would advance at Harvard’s Graduate School of Design (GSD).

Marking the fiftieth anniversary of Sert’s appointment as dean of this school, a position he held from 1953 to 1969, two associated exhibitions were held there in the fall of 2003. In addition, Hashim Sarkis, professor of architecture at the school, organized a symposium that assembled scholars for a celebration and discussion of Sert as architect, urban planner, and educator.

Josep Lluis Sert: The Architect of Urban Design, 1953–1969 was co-organized by Mary Daniels and Inés Zalduendo, librarian and project archivist, respectively, in the special collections department at the GSD’s Frances Loeb Library. The exhibition drew primarily on the archival collections at the library, documenting Sert’s years as dean and practicing architect. It profited greatly from Daniels’s and Zalduendo’s thorough knowledge of and familiarity with
the Sert collection. Their endeavor to present the multitude of plans, photographs, sketches, typescripts, and manuscripts in a visually attractive as well as intelligible manner was most successful—no small accomplishment considering the less than optimum space in Gund Hall.

Sert's urban and architectural projects were shown on the walls in aerial photographs and plans with "overlays" grouped with related documentation. Records of Sert as educator and author occupied the display cases in the center. The exhibition in its entirety was a testimonial to Sert's ability to integrate his convictions and hopes into his work as an architect, urban planner, and educator, enriching all facets of his career. The scope of his accomplishments filled his contemporaries with awe, particularly because it was in such a marked contrast with his persona: Sert was small of stature, soft-spoken, gracious, and devoid of heroic posturing.

The exhibition showed Sert and Wiener's Town Planning Associates projects, which introduced not only modifications of the CIAM canon in response to non-European contexts, but also an infusion of humanist urban design into functional planning. To ascribe this infusion only to Sert's exposure to Latin America would be simplistic; rather it reinforced the mediterraneanismo he had absorbed in Catalonia and from his friendships with artists. In the projects by Sert and Wiener, the four "functions" accepted by the Fourth CIAM Congress in 1933—dwelling, work, recreation, and transportation—were blended with the characteristics of the historic Spanish Colonial town as well as with contemporary vernacular building practices. Notable in their proposals is an emphasis on civic centers derived from the "plazas" that formed the "heart of the city" in the life of South American towns. Their adaptation of the "patio" house type became a permanent feature of their professional contributions.

Of the Latin American projects—Cidade dos Motores in Brazil (1943-47); Chimbote, Peru (1947-48); the master plan for Bogotá, Colombia, designed together with Le Corbusier (1949-53); and the Havana Pilot Plan, Cuba (1955-58)—the plan for Chimbote manifests the modification of CIAM principles probably most clearly. Chimbote was a rather shabby coastal town with a tradition of land use by squatters of all economic strata and managed by a corporation tainted by government scandals. Sert and Wiener's plan for a new town was supposed to overcome these difficulties with a "centro cívico," featuring a church, and one- and two-story houses with patios. In addition, they introduced vegetation wherever possible into the barren environment. The only part of the project to be carried out was the hotel on the beach, and the partners were not compensated for their work.

As one could see in the exhibition, Sert and Wiener encountered more favorable situations in the old cities of Bogotá and Havana, both imbued with a unique sense of place. The exhibited overlays on aerial photographs showed sensitive interventions that avoid the imposition of intrusive models of impact on the existing urban fabric. Drawings and additional photographs documented the pilot plan for Havana, which paid special attention to parks and open spaces and introduced an improved transportation network.

The attention Sert and Le Corbusier devoted to Latin American cities reverberated among urban planners in the region. It contributed to a revision of CIAM's "Charter of Athens" of 1933 that addressed a wider developing world. Following lively debates in Lima and Cuzco, an international, interdisciplinary group signed the "Charter of Machu Picchu" on the altiplano of Peru in 1977.

Sert's involvement with Latin America, where his Spanish language facilitated immediate contacts, was a prelude to sixteen significant years at Harvard. Harvard's position regarding the emergence of urbanism and architectural modernism in America has become a fervently debated topic; it certainly added poignancy to the material displayed in the glass cases in Gund Hall. Sert took on the deanship at the Graduate School of Design in 1953 as the successor to Joseph Hudnut, who had established the school by synthesizing the departments of architecture, landscape architecture, and city planning, and, as he later put it, relating "architecture and the spirit of man." Hudnut's ideas and his holistic approach to design were markedly influenced by Werner Hegemann, with whom he had worked in the American Midwest and later briefly at Columbia's School of Architecture. The link between Hegemann, who had adapted Camillo Sitte's town planning principles to an American context, and Sert via Hudnut is intriguing and offers some overlooked insights into developments at the GSD.

The documents displayed in the glass cases in Gund Hall revealed nuances of Sert's thinking regarding the direction he gave the GSD during his tenure. His desire to create a common ground, where architecture and city planning benefited from a dialogue-shaping urban design, motivated him in 1956—the year he left the presidency of CIAM—to establish the Urban Design Conferences as a means of promoting an interchange beyond the walls of the GSD. A total of thirteen Urban Design Conferences took place, the last one in 1970 after Sert's departure. Documenting the occasion of the second conference in the spring of 1957, the students defined "urban design" in a pamphlet aptly titled Synthesis, which formed part of the display. Sert continually added new trends and new programs to the GSD, ceaselessly integrating his ideas and his work as an architect and planner to his teaching. In a letter included in the exhibition, Gropius recognized this when he wrote to Sert on his retirement in May 1969: "You have united the Mediterranean spirit with that of the New World, giving the age-old patio idea of the dwelling a new meaning."

Sert's role as educator and dean was equally important as his impact on the historic campus. In order to pay tribute to that body of work, the Harvard cam-
pus and the town of Cambridge were presented as open-air exhibitions ancillary to Sert: The Architect of Urban Design. Cognizant of the show’s significance, Daniels and Zalduendo provided packets of cards that invited visitors to participate in walking tours. The buildings designed by Sert were highlighted in red on a schematic plan of Cambridge and identified by name and date. Three additional cards featured photographs of Sert’s Holyoke Center, Peabody Terrace student housing, and the Science Center, with building and floor plans on the backs of the cards.

Sert’s modern architecture, even the highrise Peabody Terrace at the edge of the campus, contributed to rather than contended with Harvard’s historic context. The layout of the buildings reflects Sert’s attention to interconnected communal spaces and circulation patterns, which also characterized his recommendations for the campus. Site visits to Sert’s work were reinforced by the exhibition in Gund Hall, where one could see his projects in Boston, a residential complex on Roosevelt Island in New York City, and student models of unbuilt projects for Boston’s South Station and the business center in Worcester, Massachusetts. The show was organized with care and perceptiveness and achieved its purpose of giving evidence of Sert’s multiple contributions and enduring new meanings to urban design. Unfortunately, this significant exhibition lasted only six weeks.

Josep Lluis Sert: Architect to the Arts II was installed in the Sert Gallery at the Carpenter Center for the Visual Arts, where it was on view for three months. Sert was instrumental in selecting Le Corbusier to design the Carpenter Center, his only work in the United States. The exhibition was organized by Mary Daniels and Inés Zalduendo with assistance from Harry Cooper, curator of modern art at the Harvard University Art Museums. Items from the special collections department at the Loeb Library included sketches, plans, photographs, and manuscripts pertaining to Sert’s art-related architectural commissions—the Spanish Pavilion of 1937, the Miró Studio, the Maeght Foundation, and the Miró Foundation. Sert donated a significant portion of his personal art collection to the Harvard University Art Museums and the Harvard Design School. Works by Joan Miró, Alexander Calder, Fernand Léger, and Le Corbusier were among the comprehensive selection that complemented the archival material; some of the artwork was on public display for the first time.

Sert’s friendships with artists and empathy with their creative needs was central to his role as “architect to the arts,” and affected the way he situated paintings and sculpture in relation to his buildings. For someone who had visited Josep Lluís and Moncha Sert in their home in Cambridge, built in 1958, it was slightly disappointing to see their art “displayed” in the Sert Gallery, bereft of the aesthetic and cultural context of the house designed by Sert himself, which was located on a small lot turned away from the street and built around a central patio with a mural by Constantino Nivola.

The exhibition documented the design and impact of Sert’s Spanish Pavilion in photographs showing the art in situ, illustrated newspaper reports on the excitement it provoked, and building plans. Although long gone, the Spanish Pavilion is remembered as a monument testing political oppression.

In 1955, Sert designed Miró’s studio in Palma de Mallorca on a hillside, using two existing terraces sustained by stone walls. The artist’s main studio, shown in photographs in the exhibition, is two stories high with north windows. Another studio was specifically designed for Miró’s graphic work, and there was a patio for sculpture. A variety of devices provided protection from the strong sun. Sert used concrete, native stone, terracotta tiles, and reinforced-concrete shells for the roof, which resembled the traditional Catalan vaults. Miró’s studio nests admirably into the landscape and responds to the climatic conditions of Mallorca.

This is also the case with Sert’s more complex Marguerite and Aimé Maeght Foundation in Saint-Paul-de-Vence, France (1959–64), which is emblematic of Sert “listening to the murmur of time and place,” as Rafael Moneo would suggest. In this design, Sert avoided the problem of creating a monolithic building to accommodate the Maeght’s space requirements. Rather he opted for designing a village of buildings and patios interconnected by outdoor and interior passages. Stones from old walls existing on the site were used for the garden. The courtyards, gardens, and interior spaces integrate art and architecture in a seamless whole. Sert achieved this effect on a smaller scale in his own house in Cambridge.

The Miró Foundation in Barcelona was begun in 1968 and completed in 1975. It is a large work memorializing an artist and architect in the context of Catalan culture. On display were preliminary sketches as well as photographs of the building—images both of the exterior, showing the city of Barcelona in the background, and of the completed interior spaces. One was a close-up of Sert and Miró discussing the building in progress. Among the photographs on view, those by Francesc Catalá-Roca were works of art in themselves.

In addition to displaying some seldom-seen works of art, Josep Lluís Sert: Architect to the Arts II made a valuable and lasting contribution by advancing the recognition that the architects of museums and galleries ought to listen and answer to the voice of art.

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