MEETINGS ON ARCHITECTURE
Freeport part of Monditalia section

CARIBBEAN MODERNITY:
Paradise as Tabula Rasa

OCT 10TH 2014
16:00
STAGE C
CORDERIE DELL’ARSENALE

SPEAKERS
MELISA VARGAS RIVERA
ALEX MARTÍNEZ SUÁREZ

LA BIENNALE DI VENEZIA

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14th. International Architecture Exhibition at La Biennale di Venezia

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Dominican Republic Panel

Organized by the Dominican Republic Pavilion and DoCoMoMo_do (Chapter in D.R.)

“Caribbean Modernity: paradise as tabula rasa”

In the context of the XIV International Architecture Exhibition at the Venice Biennale, Rem Koolhaas (curator) has raised the question of how modernity has been absorbed in the years between 1914 and 2014 around the world with a special interest in those countries that have stayed outside the global discourse. This panel aims to discuss this “absorption” in the context of the Caribbean with a special look into the Dominican Republic, taking into account its insular condition which has produced a historical struggle of external interventions and internal up-rises. Through a series of critical reflections around this general conjecture we aim to create a cohesive understanding of the meaning and implications of the Caribbean and Dominican architectural and urban production as some of the most central elements in its modernization process during the XXth century and how this centrality has been diffused in recent decades, presenting architects and planners with the question of the future and how it can be constructed.

Panel Program

Total duration: 1 hour and 30 minutes

Introduction

Duration: 5 minutes

Context and Construction

Speaker: Melisa Vargas Rivera

Duration: 30 minutes

This intervention will address the Caribbean region’s particular historical struggle between association and autonomy and its insular condition, which has represented both an advantage and a handicap: isolation has served as a defense mechanism as much as it has posed the threat of disconnection. It will also analyze the impact of hurricanes and other disasters, constantly washing away the territory and creating blank slates to start over from. It will consider the American Monroe Doctrine in the beginning of the XXth century as a kind of ground zero from which modernity was propelled in the region and the Dominican Republic. Also, it will address the critical period
between 1930 and 1961 in which the emergence of one of the most ruthless dictatorships of the region, led by Rafael Trujillo, was ideologically based both in the implementation of authority through fear and the construction of order through the modernization of the then mostly rural and virgin country, with the use of a unique “double code” of rational and neo-classical buildings to create an architectural representation of its power that didn’t sacrifice the portentous excess of power nor the intelligence and economy of progressiveness.

**Legacy, Expansion and Ruin**

*Speaker: Alex Martínez Suárez*

**Duration: 30 minutes**

This intervention will continue to look into the modern architecture developed during Trujillo’s regime and will analyze how progress was also treated as spectacle by looking at The Peace and Confraternity of the Free World International Fair an urban complex, its architecture and the impact it had for the country. Also will address the dissolution of an urban discourse and the beginning of speculative urban expansion in the decades following the fall of the dictatorship. Though architecture was still attached to modern precepts the city began to be shaped by a kind of “real state urbanism” which still dominates its development today. The architectural transition towards the present neo-liberal Dominican city will be addressed, as well as the current state of the modern legacy where some of the icons left, today, are just forgotten ruins.

**Discussion and audience questions: 25 minutes**
“Caribbean Modernity: paradise as tabula rasa”

Speakers

Melisa Vargas Rivera

Dominican architect, studied at the Universidad Iberoamericana, Santo Domingo (2004), Berlage Institute, Rotterdam (2007), Goldsmiths College UCL, London (2008). She has worked at Wiel Arets Architects, Amsterdam; DSDHA in London, Sanchez & Curiel Architects in Santo Domingo and was co-editor of Archivos de Arquitectura Antillana Magazine from 2010 to 2012. Her research “Traded Space: the political geography of the Haitian-Dominican border,” received the award for Theory and Research at the XI Architecture Biennale of Santo Domingo. She has published articles and essays in MoNU Magazine (Rotterdam), Arquitexto (Santo Domingo) and has collaborated with Store Front for Architecture (New York) as national expert. She has been teaching Architecture Theory, Urbanism and Architectural Design at the Architecture School and has been in charge of the Research Module of the Master in Sustainable Design of Universidad Iberoamericana of Santo Domingo since 2009. She is a member of the Dominican chapter of Do.Co.Mo.Mo since 2009. She coordinated and was a panelist in the Seminar “Retrospective Future” along with guest professor Elia Zenghelis at UNIBE (2013). She is part of the Coordinating Planning Unit that is currently executing the renewal projects for the Colonial City of Santo Domingo within the Ministry of Tourism of the Dominican Republic with funds loaned to the Dominican Government by the International Development Bank.

Alex Martínez Suárez

Dominican architect, he graduated from the Universidad Iberoamericana (UNIBE) in Santo Domingo, and has a Master in Advanced Architecture of the Berlage Institute. Has had a prominent participation in biennales and international competitions holding several fellowships awards and research grants. Currently is a columnist and member of the Editorial Board of Arquitexto Magazine and collaborator in other international editorial projects. Since 2008 is conducting research as member of the Dominican Chapter of Docomomo and the Erwin Walter Palm Foundation. As an Adjunct professor at the School of Architecture of Universidad Iberoamericana UNIBE has taught Architecture Theory and Design Studio, also as leader professor in the Masters in Sustainable Design program. He has taught and lectured at Universidad Piloto de Colombia (Bogotá), Pontificia Universidad Católica de Puerto Rico (Ponce), the AA Haiti Visiting School (Port-au-Prince) and in the Master of Caribbean Tropical Architecture in Universidad Nacional Pedro Henríquez Ureña UNPHU. In 2010 he directed with Shigeru Ban the "Disaster Relief Project: Haiti," a major humanitarian project undertaken in Haiti after the earthquake that year. He is principal architect of Estudio Forma [Architecture and City].
“Caribbean Modernity: paradise as tabula rasa” is the title of the conversation organized by the Dominican Republic Pavilion and the DoCoMoMo_do in in the context of the Freeport conceived as part of the exhibition Monditalia.

Through a series of critical reflections around the general conjecture on how modernity was absorbed in the context of the Caribbean, this conversation will take a special look into the Dominican Republic, taking into account its insular condition, which has produced a historical struggle of external interventions and internal uprises. The discussion between researchers Melisa Vargas Rivera and Alex Martínez Suárez aims to create a cohesive understanding of the meaning and implications of the Caribbean and Dominican architectural and urban production as some of the most central elements in its modernization process during the XXth century and how this centrality has been diffused in recent decades. The speakers will address the Caribbean region’s particular historical struggle between association and autonomy, which has represented both an advantage and a handicap: isolation has served as a defense mechanism as well as it has posed the threat of disconnection. Also the critical period between 1930 and 1961 in which the emergence one of the most ruthless dictatorships of the region, led by Rafael Trujillo in the Dominican Republic, was ideologically based both in the implementation of authority through fear and the construction of order through the modernization of the then mostly rural and virgin country. Finally, they will look at the transition to the present scenario as well as the current state of the modern legacy.

PROGRAMME

October 10th 2014 - Corderie of the Arsenale, stage C
4:00 pm - Introduction
4:05 pm - Melisa Vargas Rivera | Context and Construction
4:35 pm - Alex Martínez Suárez | Legacy, Expansion and Ruin
5:05 pm - Discussion and audience questions
(Limited seating)