

SEE BERT

architect in New York

Sert: architect in New York

4th April to 29th June 1997

Josep Lluís Sert (1902-1983) was a key figure in the development of Modern architecture in the post-war decades and was also the main person responsible for introducing the modern movement into Spain. Together with other young architects, in 1930 he founded the GATCPAC (*Group Of Catalan Architects and Technicians in favour of Progress in Architecture*). At the time, Sert had already worked for Le Corbusier in Paris, had invited him to give lectures in Barcelona and in 1933, they worked together on the Macià Plan, an ambitious urban proposal which applies the principles of *ville radieuse* to the city of Barcelona but was abruptly ended by the fall of the Republican Government and the outbreak of the Civil War.

In 1937, Sert and Luis Lacasa built the Pavilion of the Spanish Republic at the International Exhibition in Paris, with the presence of the mural painting *Guernica* by Pablo Picasso alongside with works by Joan Miró, Alexander Calder, Julio González and other artists who actively supported the Republic. Sert lived in Paris until 1939 when, at the end of the Civil War, he was declared "unable to exercise his profession" by the new government and was forced to remain in permanent exile. Because of the Second World War, Sert did as many other European architects and artists did, and moved to New York where he lived until 1957, when he left his TPA architecture office (Town Planning Associates). Sert moved to Cambridge, Massachusetts where he had already been appointed Dean of the School of Design at Harvard University in 1953, a position bestowed on him by Walter Gropius and which he held until 1969.

From 1947 to 1959, Sert chaired the CIAM (Congrès Internationaux d'Architecture Moderne) in which he had participated since their beginnings, whose central debate was especially directed at the problems of towns. Sert was to bring together the theses of CIAM IV in his book *Can our Cities Survive?*, published in 1942. The post-war period brought about a renewal of the urban proposals of the modern movement and this inflection was made particularly clear in the manifesto "Nine Points on Monumentality" which Sert wrote together with Sigfried Giedion and Fernand Léger in 1943.

This work demanded a “new monumentality” for Modern architecture to enable it to communicate with a wide audience and its proposals to be linked with historical precedents. The architectural and urban expression of this manifesto was to appear in the projects for Latin American cities which Sert carried out alongside Paul Lester Wiener from 1943 to 1956. The ideas behind the change of posture of Modern architects were reflected in the theses of CIAM 8 (1951), and especially in the text written by Sert which brought together the two main arguments, that is, the need to provide cities with a “civic centre” and the necessary collaboration between architects and artists to ensure that modern architecture communicated in the desired manner.

During his years at the Harvard school of architecture, Sert built complexes such as the Maeght Foundation in Saint Paul de Vence (1959-64) and the Miró Foundation in Barcelona (1973-75). In Massachusetts, among other projects, he created the central Campus of Boston University (1963-66) as well as a number of university buildings for Harvard University, such as the Holyoke Center (1958-65), the Science Center (1973) and the married students' quarters (1964).

The Museu d'Art Contemporani de Barcelona has produced an exhibition on Sert's early years in America -from 1939 to the mid-50s in New York. The subject has a double edge; on the one hand, Sert is shown as a symptom of the European culture which, with the war, was forced to emigrate to North America. In terms of architectural production, this change of residence and the upheaval of war were translated into new formulae for his proposals, some of which were directly promoted by the North American war office itself.

Exile in New York provided a series of meetings between artists and architects, most of which were European, and in the case of Sert, these meetings turned into a number of collaborations. These works enjoyed the participation of such artists as Hans Hofmann, Costantino Nivola, Alexander Calder or Fernand Léger. A strong case is presented by the films *8 x 8* and *Dadascope*, produced by Hans Richter, in which Sert takes part alongside Marcel Duchamp, Max Ernst, Jean Cocteau and Frederick Kiesler. The films were conceived as a series of sequences which make a common reference to the game of chess, a continuation of some of the surrealist films produced in Europe before the war.

On the other hand, this period of the work of Sert in New York is dominated by a series of projects for Latin American cities. The various urban projects for Brazil, Venezuela, Colombia, Peru and Cuba all participate in the preoccupation for renewal of the ideas of Modern architecture.

Sert worked with the German architect Paul Lester Wiener to begin this series with the project *Cidade Dos Motores* in Brazil, a new city linked to an industrial area which was followed by other cities such as Chimbote in Peru or the new Colombian city of Tumaco, in which not only was the new port developed, but the social and cultural conditions of the population were reflected and used. Other projects were drawn up for Bogota, a city where Sert and Wiener collaborated with Le Corbusier on the pilot plan, as well as Havana, Lima, Medellin, Cali and Maracaibo.

In these projects, Sert anticipated certain themes which would be continued by the work of TEAM X several years later, that is, the coexistence of Modern internationalism with a new interest for local traditions in architecture and space for public gatherings. However, the Latin American projects also brought forth new political implications, as described by Eric Mumford in this exhibition's catalogue,

"No longer engagé political participants in post-war Latin America, but outside "experts" linked to the economic and military power of the United States and the artistic prestige of Le Corbusier, Sert and his collaborators sought to make modernism more acceptable by appealing to local urban traditions, yet found that their efforts to spur democratic development by providing spaces for public gathering lacked local governmental support."

To counter the anonymous features of a Modern city, Sert proposed a Civic Centre as an increasingly important element of the projects. The root suggestion of this element, which brings together the main institutions of a city and at the same time is the centre of urban life, might have been the proposals of the North American *Regional Planning* or by the Latin American cities themselves with their traditional *Plazas de Armas*. In the projects of Sert and Wiener, these centres are intended to be centres of dialogue between contemporary art and architecture. The civic center arises as an expression of the common popular will and follows the lines of the "Nine Points on Monumentality." The proposed integration of the arts is a field explored by Sert both in official and spontaneous collaborations.

An exhibition in the Koots Gallery in New York presented an opportunity to collaborate with the artist Hans Hofmann on walls, pavements and mosaics for the church of Chimbote. In the Puerto Ordaz project (Venezuela) the Church included elements moulded in the bas-relief in which we can appreciate the influence of the sand casting technique which Tino Nivola was developing in his study on Long Island at more or less the same time.

Collaboration with Nivola was embodied in the great mural painting which is now in the Harvard Science Center. Le Corbusier, who also lived in New York in the mid-40s while preparing the project for the United Nations, also worked with Nivola and his sand casting.

These materials reflect the key role Sert played in reformulating modern architecture after the Second World War and also illustrates the difficult encounter between the European architecture of the CIAM and North American tradition. When the influential North American historian and critic Lewis Mumford refused to introduce Sert's book *Can our Cities Survive?* he was reflecting the rejection of the European proposals based on the North American understanding of cities. Both questions, the incursion of the modern movement after the war and the encounter of Europe and America determined the course of international architecture in the decades which followed. In this work on Sert we hope to provide the basic materials and reflections for reexamination of these decisive years.

The exhibition shows original drawings and sketches from the Sert archives at Harvard University as well as the Wiener archives at Oregon University, most of which are being shown for the first time and are complemented by photographic documents. Sert's collaboration with artists is revealed in oils, bas-reliefs and sculptures by Hans Hofmann, Costantino Nivola, Fernand Léger and Alexander Calder, as well as in the films *8 x 8* and *Dadascope* produced by Hans Richter together with Marcel Duchamp, Max Ernst, Jean Cocteau, Frederick Kiesler, Calder and Sert.

The catalogue contains Sert's main writings from this period together with essays by Joan Ockman, Eric Mumford, Maria Rubert, Josep M. Rovira, Guido Hartray and Xavier Costa.

Curators: Xavier Costa and Guido Hartray

Coordination: Suzanne Strum

Design of the Exhibition: José M^a Torres Nadal

Collaborations:

Frances Loeb Library, Harvard University
André Emmerich Gallery, NY
ETH Zurich
Jaume Freixa
Ruth Guggenheim
Lillian Kiesler
Fondation Le Corbusier
Fundació Joan Miró
The Museum of Modern Art
University of Oregon, Knight Library

SERT

architect in New York

After two years living in Paris, where he had been responsible for the Spanish Republic's pavilion, **Josep Lluís Sert** (1902-1983) chose New York to spend his years of exile. Along with many other European artists and architects of the period he felt compelled to leave the continent during the war. He arrived there during the summer of 1939. In New York, Sert established himself first in Manhattan and then in the house he built in Long Island, before leaving New York in 1957 for Harvard.

Sert's work and writings from this period illustrate the tumultuous confluence of both North American and European cultures against a background of the wartime conflict. During the exile, European art and architecture were exposed to a new context causing a change of stance in the avantgarde, of which Sert had been a leading figure in Barcelona.

In 1943, together with artist Fernand Léger and critic Sigfried Giedion, Sert wrote a manifesto summing up the debate of that time. The "Nine Points On Monumentality", reproduced schematically here, called for the reintroduction of monumentality in the Modern Movement, based on the recuperation of public space —including new public buildings and with the "advertising" potential of architecture— and the joint effort of artists and architects.

The debate on monumentality continued over the forties and fifties and put forward some of the main concerns in the following decades. In his projects for some Southern American cities, in collaboration with Paul Lester Wiener, Sert puts these ideas into practice. These show a shift from the typical thirties' functionalist layout — like those he had tried in Barcelona with the Macià Urban Plan, planned with Corbusier and some other members of the GATCPAC— to another design closer to the "Nine Points" postulates. This progression can be clearly seen in the projects done for Brazil, Colombia, Peru and Venezuela, as shown here.

Sert had included works of Picasso, Miró, Calder and González in the Spanish Republic pavilion of 1937. His interest in working with artists continued over that period: for instance, with Hans Hofmann, who did the mosaics of both the church and square at Chimbote or with Constantino Nivola who was responsible for the Science Center's mural. His friendship with other artists in postwar New York is reflected in his personal collection, currently scattered, and in his contribution to the films made by Hans Richter, Max Ernst, Jean Cocteau, Frederick Kiesler, Man Ray and Marcel Duchamp.

Nine points on Monumentality

Josep Lluís Sert, Fernand Léger, Sigfried Giedion

1. Monuments are human landmarks which men have created as symbols for their ideals, for their aims, and for their actions.
2. Monuments have to satisfy the eternal demand of the people for translation of their collective force into symbols.
3. Monuments are only possible in periods in which a unifying consciousness and unifying culture exists.
4. The so-called monuments of recent date, do not represent the spirit of the collective feeling of modern times.
5. There are no frontiers between architecture and town planning, just as there are no frontiers between the city and the region.
6. Postwar changes in the whole economic structure of nations may bring with them the organization of community life in the city.
7. A monument integrates the work of the planner, architect, painter, sculptor, and landscapist.
8. Large scale replanning is necessary to create vast open spaces in the now decaying areas of our cities.
9. Monumental architecture will be something more than strictly functional. It will have regained its lyrical value.

Films

Several episodes are shown from Hans Richter's films **8x8** and **Dadascope**:

8 x 8, A Chess Sonata for Strings

(1957)

by Hans Richter

Credits, 3'15"

Jean Arp, Jacqueline Matisse, Marcel Duchamp, Yves Tanguy, Alexander Calder, Willem de Vogel, Dorothea and Max Ernst, Jean Cocteau, Paul Bowles, Ahmed Ben Driss El Yacoubi, Josep Lluís Sert, Paul Lester Wiener and Frederick Kiesler

A New Twist

with Alexander Calder, 7'04"

The Queening of the Pawn

by Jean Cocteau, 4'38"

Dadascope

(1961)

by Hans Richter

Credits, 1'06"

Revolving Doors

by Man Ray, 2'37"

Puns by Marcel Duchamp, 1'34"

Souvenirs by Marcelo Janco

with Josep Lluís Sert and Frederick Kiesler, 1'05"

POUPOUPOU

by Jean Arp, with Frederick Kiesler, 2'07"

La Chanson Dada

by Tristan Tzara, 3'05"

Exhibition Checklist

Fernand Léger
Composition 1935
Oil on cardboard
38 x 46 cm
Fundació Joan Miró. Donated by Josep Lluís Sert

Hans Hofmann
The Chimbote Mural Project
Study of Chimbote plaza mosaic, 1950
Crayon and pencil on paper
60 x 48 cm
Courtesy of André Emmerich Gallery

Hans Hofmann
The Chimbote Mural Project
Untitled, 1950
Oil on paper on board
213 x 91 cm
Courtesy of André Emmerich Gallery

Hans Hofmann
The Chimbote Mural Project
Chimbote Mural, Fragment of Part 1, 1950
Oil on board
213 x 91 cm
Courtesy of André Emmerich Gallery

Hans Hofmann
The Chimbote Mural Project
Chimbote Mural, 1950
Oil on board
213 x 91 cm
Courtesy of André Emmerich Gallery

Hans Hofmann
The Chimbote Mural Project
Untitled, 1950
Oil on paper on board
213 x 91 cm
Courtesy of André Emmerich Gallery

Costantino Nivola
Bas relief study panel for the Harvard University Science Center, 1953
sand casting in wood frame
50 x 238 x 6.8 cm
Collection of Ruth Guggenheim Nivola

Alexander Calder
El Corcovado, 1951
mobile of painted aluminum and iron
360 x 379 x 165 cm
Fundació Joan Miró Donated by Josep Lluís Sert

Alexander Calder
Untitled, 1961
Gouache on paper
35 x 40 cm
Galería Senda

Hans Richter
8x8 A Chess Sonata for Strings, 1957
Film, 80'
Estate of Hans Richter

Film realized with the participation of Jean Arp, Paul Bowles, Alexander Calder, Marcel Duchamp, Dorothea Tanning and Max Ernst, Jean Cocteau, Jacqueline Matisse, Josep Lluís Sert, Yves Tanguy, Frederick Kiesler and others

Publicity Program
Wiener Archives. University of Oregon

Josep Lluís Sert and Frederick Kiesler in a scene from the film
Kiesler Archive, Collection of Lillian Kiesler

Hans Richter
Dadascope, 1961
Film, 41
Estate of Hans Richter

Film realized with the participation of Jean Arp, Marcel Duchamp, Raoul Hausmann, Man Ray, Hans Richter, Kurt Schwitters, Tristan Tzara, José Lluís Sert, Frederick Kiesler and others.

Projects

**Josep Lluís Sert and Paul Lester Wiener
Town Planning Associates
Cidade dos Motores, Brasil, 1945**

Sketch of the Urbanization
Pencil on paper
31x31 cm
Sert Collection. Harvard University

Bird's eye view,
Ink on paper
105 x 73 cm
Sert Collection. Harvard University

Study of the civic center
Ink and pencil on paper
29x62 cm
Sert Collection. Harvard University

Perspective of the civic center
Ink on paper
34 x 25 cm
Sert Collection. Harvard University

**José Lluís Sert and Paul Lester Wiener
Town Planning Associates
Tumaco Colombia, 1947**

Preliminary Study of the General Plan
Pencil on paper
95x66 cm
Wiener Archives. University of Oregon

Study of Civic Center and Residential Sector 1
Pencil on paper
30 x 30 cm
Wiener Archives. University of Oregon

Study of the church, section and plan
Pencil on tracing paper
50 x 33 cm
Wiener Archives. University of Oregon

Study of the church section,
ink pencil and colored pencil on paper
33 x 13 cm
Sert Collection. Harvard University

Sketch of housing elevation,
Pencil on paper
86x48 cm
Wiener Archives. University of Oregon

**Josep Lluís Sert and Paul Lester Wiener
Town Planning Associates
The New Town of Chimbote, Peru, 1948**

Plan of the Urbanization
Ink and pencil on paper
19 x 20 cm
Sert Collection. Harvard University

Aerial perspective,
ink on paper
23x18 cm
Sert Collection. Harvard University

Study of patios, housing and patio walls
Pencil on paper
19x27
Sert Collection. Harvard University

Plan and section of two story housing
Pencil on paper
20x20 cm
Sert Collection. Harvard University

Study of windows
Pencil on paper
22x29 cm
Sert Collection. Harvard University

Section elevation and interior perspective of a bedroom
Pencil on paper
22x16 cm
Sert Collection. Harvard University

**Josep Lluís Sert and Paul Lester Wiener
Town Planning Associates
Pomona, Venezuela, 1951**

Elevation and plan of housing
Pencil and film on vellum
120 x 80 cm
Wiener Archives. University of Oregon

**Josep Lluís Sert and Paul Lester Wiener
Town Planning Associates
Puerto Ordaz, Venezuela, 1953**

Study site plan
Ink, pencil, and film on paper
43 x 26 cm
Sert Collection. Harvard University

Preliminary study of the civic center and church
Ink on paper
21 x 27 cm
Sert Collection. Harvard University

Study of the civic center
Ink and pencil on paper
35 x 50 cm
Sert Collection. Harvard University

Elevation of Church
Pencil on paper
25 x 15 cm
Sert Collection. Harvard University

Section of church
Ink on paper
25 x 15 cm
Sert Collection. Harvard University

Aerial View of Cerro Bolivar
Photograph
Wiener Archives. University of Oregon

**Josep Lluís Sert and Paul Lester Wiener
Town Planning Associates
Master Plan for Bogota, Colombia, 1951 - 1953**

Study of hillside development
Ink on paper
27 x 21 cm
Sert Collection. Harvard University

Vaulted housing
Ink and pencil on paper
21 x 24 cm
Sert Collection. Harvard University

Social Service Sector
Pencil on paper
Sert Collection. Harvard University

Vaulted housing
Model of the project for Medellin
Photograph
Wiener Archives. University of Oregon

Tram station under construction
Photographs
Wiener Archives. University of Oregon

Thin shell concrete roof under construction
Photograph
Wiener Archives. University of Oregon

Vaulted roof housing under construction
Photograph
Wiener Archives. University of Oregon

**Josep Lluís Sert
Sert House, Locust Valley, Long Island, New York**

Exterior View
Photographs
Sert Collection. Harvard University

Interior of the house
Photographs
Sert Collection. Harvard University and
Collection of Jaume Freixa

Other Documents

CIAM 8

The Heart of the City: towards the humanisation of urban life

Edited by J. Tyrwhitt, J.L. Sert, E.N. Rogers

Lund Humphries, London 1952

Book

Col.legi d'Arquitectes de Catalunya. Demarcació de Barcelona. Biblioteca

Josep Lluís Sert and Paul Lester Wiener

"Urbanisme en Amerique Latine"

Architecture d'Aujourd'hui. 33 (December 1950)

Collection of L'Architecture d'Aujourd'hui

Life in a Modern World

Poster, 1943

Collection of Jaume Freixa

Two Cities: Planning in North and South America

Exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art, 1947

Catalogue

The Museum of Modern Art Archives

Josep Lluís Sert and Paul Lester Wiener

"Can Patios Make Cities"

Architecural Forum (August 1953)

Escola Tècnica Superior d'Arquitectura de Barcelona. Biblioteca