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# Carlos Raúl Villanueva

## Modern Architecture and Synthesis of the Arts

30 October 2024 - 2 March 2025

Venezuelan architect and urban planner Carlos Raúl Villanueva (1900-1975) was a major figure in the modern movement and its development in Latin America. Raised and educated in Paris, he later abandoned the academic classicism of his early work and reshaped the face of Venezuela and its capital Caracas over the next four decades. The megalopolis had seen particularly rapid growth due to mass rural exodus in the 1940s. This gave Villanueva the opportunity to carry out large-scale projects for the Venezuelan government, such as collective housing and facilities, as well as his major work, the Ciudad Universitaria de Caracas (1944-1970). Villanueva created real synergy within the campus by integrating works by 24 avant-garde artists into the different buildings. The projects shown here are by Alexander Calder, Victor Vasarely, Fernand Léger, Antoine Pevsner, Jean Arp, André Bloc, Henri Laurens, Sophie Taeuber-Arp, Jesús-Rafael Soto and Wifredo Lam. Listed as UNESCO World Heritage in 2000, the Ciudad Universitaria de Caracas is an emblematic example of modern architecture and the synthesis of the arts in Latin America.

## Victor Vasarely and the Central Area

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An emblematic figure of kinetic art, Victor Vasarely (1906-1997) promoted a social art that was accessible to all. He gradually started exploring kinetics, playing with contradictory axonometric perspectives, as in *Homage to Malevich* (1952-1958). In 1954, he produced his first “architectural integrations” at the Ciudad Universitaria de Caracas, where he presented *Homage to Malevich*, *Sophie* and *Positive-Negative* in the Central Area. After the hospital complex and Olympic stadium, Villanueva devoted himself to this Central Area in the 1950s. It contained most of the major buildings, including the main Auditorium and the Central Library, standing around the Covered Plaza, and many works of art.



Covered Plaza (1952-1953). *Positive-Negative* (1954) by Victor Vasarely, Ciudad Universitaria de Caracas. Photo: Paolo Gasparini © Archivo Fundación Villanueva, 2001



Main Auditorium (1952-1954). *Acoustic Clouds* (1953) by Alexander Calder, Ciudad Universitaria de Caracas. Photo: Paolo Gasparini © Archivo Fundación Villanueva, 2001

## Alexander Calder and Aula Magna

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A prolific sculptor and drawer, Alexander Calder (1898-1976) built connections with the avant-garde artists in the 1930s. With great finesse and a strong sense of humour, he produced his first moving abstract sculptures. His resolutely modern works were characterised by colour, light and poesy, unlike traditional sculpture. When Villanueva first saw Calder’s work at the Exposition Universelle in Paris in 1937, he bought a mobile for his residence, Casa Caoma, and invited him to contribute to the programme he was orchestrating in Caracas, designed to bring together the arts, notably in Aula Magna. For his suspended *Clouds*, which are evocative of brightly coloured fish scales, the sculptor drew inspiration from the aquatic world, in keeping with the shell-like shape of the concrete building. In addition to their aesthetic quality, the *Clouds* serve an acoustic purpose developed by engineer Robert Newman. They enhance the building by adorning it with splashes of colour and give it excellent acoustics.

## Fernand Léger and the Central Library

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A painter of modern life, Fernand Léger (1881-1955) promoted art for all and at the service of all. His work took on an increasingly monumental, architectural dimension, especially after a period spent in the USA from 1940 to 1945. For the Central Library in Caracas, he produced a set of stained-glass windows with a distinctly modern flavour, using the black outlines typical of his creative output to add emphasis to his colourful abstracts. The Central Library of the University of Caracas is a sturdy, cubic and vibrantly coloured building. An architectural landmark and sculptural object, the layout of its volumes prefigures the coloured cube design imagined by Villanueva for the Montreal exhibition in 1967. Its geometrical shapes point to an interest in a streamlined and abstract architectural language. It is a campus icon, illustrating Villanueva's thought processes regarding light and its filters.



Central Library (1952-1953). *Stained glass* (1954) by Fernand Léger, Ciudad Universitaria de Caracas. Photo: Paolo Gasparini © Archivo Fundación Villanueva, 2001



Covered Plaza (1952-1953). *Dynamic Projection at 30 degrees* (1953) by Antoine Pevsner, Ciudad Universitaria de Caracas. Photo: Paolo Gasparini © Archivo Fundación Villanueva, 2001

## Antoine Pevsner and the Covered Plaza

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In 1911, painter and sculptor Antoine Pevsner (1884-1962) travelled to Paris where he was marked by the Cubists and the use of metal for the Eiffel Tower. On returning to Russia, he adopted a fresh approach to sculpture and, in 1920, co-signed the *Realistic Manifesto* with his brother Naum Gabo, which provided a framework for their constructive and abstract experimentations. At the University of Caracas, he presented *Dynamic Projection at 30 degrees*, in the Covered Plaza which connects the buildings and patios of the Central Complex. It provides shade from the burning sun and offers a range of visual counterpoints including mosaics, frescoes and sculptures by different artists. These works of art break up the kaleidoscopic area, which is brightened by natural light and plants.

## Jean Arp and the Covered Plaza

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Sculptor, painter and poet Jean Arp (1886-1966) was a founding member of the Dada movement in Zurich. He was also close to the Surrealists, before gradually distancing himself from the group to join Michel Seuphor and Joaquín Torres García's "Cercle et Carré" group favouring pure abstraction. In 1931, he joined the "Abstraction-Création" group founded by Theo Van Doesburg. He developed his research in abstract, biomorphic volumes with a myriad of poetic correspondences. Invited to contribute to the Caracas project in 1953, he produced the *Cloud Shepherd* for the Covered Plaza. This was a developed version of the *Elf*, a mischievous figure he discovered in his studio one day. Located close to a stretch of water and a cluster of different species of palm trees, the sculpture fits into the environment of the Covered Plaza, punctuated by skilfully orchestrated and staged natural elements.



Covered Plaza (1952-1953). *Cloud Shepherd* (1953) by Jean Arp. *Murale* (1954) by Mateo Manaure, Ciudad Universitaria de Caracas. Photo: Paolo Gasparini © Archivo Fundación Villanueva, 2001



*Relief wall painting* (undated) by André Bloc. *Dynamic Projection at 30 degrees* (1953) by Antoine Pevsner, Rectorate Plaza (1952-1953). Ciudad Universitaria de Caracas © Bibliothèque Kandinsky, MNAM-CCI, Centre Pompidou

## André Bloc and the Rectorate Plaza

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An architect, painter, engraver, sculptor, writer and publisher, André Bloc (1896-1966) was a founding member of the famous journal *Architecture d'aujourd'hui*, of which the first issue was published in 1930. Influenced by the work of Henri Laurens, Jean Arp, Fernand Léger, Constantin Brancusi and Le Corbusier, he developed a practice that combined architecture and sculpture with the aim of synthesising the arts. For the University campus, Bloc created a mural work situated on the Rectorate Plaza, which is the first point of contact between the city and the campus. Now pedestrianised, it was originally designed as an entrance for both pedestrians and vehicles. This dense passageway is the public face of the campus and boasts a monumental clocktower built by engineer Juancho Otaola and acting as a dynamic landmark.

## Henri Laurens y la Plaza Cubierta

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Sculptor Henri Laurens (1885-1954) was influenced by the work of Paul Cézanne and the Cubists, especially Georges Braque, who he met Paris in 1911. Moving towards increasingly fluid volumes bordering on biomorphism, he incorporated notions of rhythm and movement into his sculptures. The bronze *Amphion* in the Covered Plaza of the University of Caracas was commissioned by Villanueva in the presence of André Bloc. It is set in a mineral universe where the interaction of art and architecture produces a total artwork in a completely mastered natural setting.



Covered Plaza (1952-1953). *Amphion* (1953) by Henri Laurens. *Bimurale* (1954) by Fernand Léger, Ciudad Universitaria de Caracas © Archivo Fundación Villanueva, 2001



Psychology Library (1953-1955). *Sonority* (1955) by Sophie Taeuber-Arp. *Silhouettes in relief* (1956) by Jean Arp, Ciudad Universitaria de Caracas. Photo: Paolo Gasparini © Archivo Fundación Villanueva, 2001

## Sophie Taeuber-Arp and the Faculty of Legal and Political Sciences and Humanities

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A key figure among avant-garde artistes and committed to fighting fascism, Sophie Taeuber-Arp (1889-1943) was married to Jean Arp and was connected with multiple artistic movements and groups, including Dada, Surrealism, “Cercle et Carré” and “Abstraction-Création”. She developed highly diverse methods, ranging from painting and sculpture through to textile creation and the performing arts. In 1928, Taeuber-Arp participated in the Aubette project in Strasbourg (France) at the request of neo-plastic artist Theo Van Doesburg. This synthesis of the arts prefigured the University of Caracas project, for which Taeuber-Arp produced a fresco for the Psychology Library housed in the Faculty of Legal and Political Sciences and Humanities. Built at the heart of the campus on a main thoroughfare, it separates the central complex from the Olympic stadium. This mindset is in line with Le Corbusier’s “zoning” principle, in which urban areas are divided up according to purpose. The building stands at the end of the University Hospital, which extends out like the prow of a boat.

## Wifredo Lam and the Experimental Botanical Institute

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In 1938, Cuban painter and designer Wifredo Lam (1902-1982) travelled to Paris where he frequented intellectual and artistic circles. He notably forged a lasting friendship with Pablo Picasso, nurtured by a reciprocal interest. At the crossroads between cultures, Lam's work drew on the experimentations of Cézanne, Matisse and Picasso, as well as the African arts he studied. Influenced by Surrealism, his pictorial language was populated with protean creatures at the frontier between animals, plants and humans. For the Experimental Botanical Institute of the University of Caracas, he produced a large-scale mural that showcased his expressive and colourful graphic style over several metres. The Institute was listed as World Heritage by UNESCO in 2000 for its pioneering role in botanical research and its inestimable heritage.



Experimental Botanical Institute. *Mural relief* (1957) by Wifredo Lam, Ciudad Universitaria de Caracas. Photo: Paolo Gasparini © Archivo Fundación Villanueva, 2001



Venezuela Pavilion (1967) by Carlos Raúl Villanueva, Montreal. Photo: Paolo Gasparini © Archivo Fundación Villanueva, 2001

## Jesús-Rafael Soto and the Venezuela Pavilion

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Jesús-Rafael Soto (1923-2005) was a major representative of kinetic art. The visual dynamics he introduced into his works reflected his interest in movement, whether virtual through the repetition of shapes and colours, or real through the viewer's own movement. Starting in 1967, Soto developed his *Penetrables*. For the Exposition Universelle in Montreal, where Villanueva won the competition for the Venezuela Pavilion, Soto created *Volumen Suspendido*, a large yellow and white moving *Penetrable*. The work was suspended over a pond and accompanied by an electronic sound environment by Antonio Estévez. This was another way of blending architecture, sculpture and music.



## Museo Soto, Ciudad Bolívar (Venezuela)

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The Museo Soto is Carlos Raúl Villanueva's last project. It is located in the birthplace of Jesús-Rafael Soto, Ciudad Bolívar, for which the artist wished to donate his collection. The complex is made up of six pavilions, all exceptionally built in prefabricated concrete, part of which is dedicated to exhibitions. Two interior gardens are reserved for sculptures. Despite the geometry of the complex, the architect succeeded in blurring the boundaries: canopies and covered passageways dilute the transitions between inside and outside, while art and vegetation form an integral part of the overall design. Around 700 of Soto's works are on display alongside his personal collection of works by artists from the international avant-garde. The museum was completed thanks to guidelines left by Villanueva before his death.



Museo Soto (1970), Ciudad Bolívar, Venezuela, Photo: Paolo Gasparini © Archivo Fundación, Villanueva, 2001



Curved covered passageway, circa 1957.  
Ciudad Universitaria de Caracas. Photo: Paolo Gasparini © Archivo Fundación, Villanueva, 2001



Undulating covered passageway, circa 1957.  
Ciudad Universitaria de Caracas  
© Archivo Fundación, Villanueva, 2001

## Covered passageways and circulation

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Venezuela's tropical climate meant that Villanueva had to design shaded circulation routes for the campus. To achieve this, he developed a variety of strategies that added to the urban quality of the Ciudad Universitaria. In addition to the screen walling systems that filter the light and provide ventilation, all the routes are protected by canopies, straight, curved or undulating concrete roofs that link the buildings on the campus and structure movement.

## Team

### Centre Pompidou

#### Curator

Valentina Moimas

#### Assistant Curator

Camille Lenglois

#### Coordination

Yandé Diouf

#### Collection Manager

Hugo Perez

#### Registrar

Laurine Leblanc

#### Mediation

Celia Crétien

#### Press

Clotilde Sence

### Centre Pompidou Málaga

#### Director

Luis Lafuente Batanero

#### Collection Manager

Elena Robles García

#### Conservation

Elisa Quiles Faz

#### Scenography

Corzón Arquitectos

#### Corporate identity

Gloria Rueda Chaves

#### Installation

UTE ICCI (Ingeniería Cultural y Cobra Instalaciones)

#### Mediation

Factoría de Arte y Desarrollo

#### Communication

GAP and co

## Guided tours

The mediation team offers you guided tours to discover the works from the exhibition, in an active and sensitive way.

### Individual tours

Visit in Spanish included in the price of the ticket. Inscription on the same day at the reception. 25 people maximum.

Wednesday at 6 pm

### Groups

In Spanish, English and French

25 people maximum

By prior reservation:

[educacion.centrepompidou@malaga.eu](mailto:educacion.centrepompidou@malaga.eu)

Discover all our activities (tours, workshops, events...) on our website: [centrepompidou-malaga.eu](http://centrepompidou-malaga.eu)

## Information

### Opening hours

9.30 am to 8.00 pm, every day

Ticket offices close at 7:30 pm

The museum is closed on Tuesdays (except holidays and days before holidays), 1 January and 25 December

### Prices

Temporary exhibitions:

€4, concessions: €2.50

Semi-permanent exhibitions:

€7, concessions: €4

Semi-permanent and temporary exhibitions:

€9, concessions: €5.50

### Contact

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